Opinion



A mother makes a cross from a palm frond during Palm Sunday Mass March 25 at Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Solomons, Md. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)



by Mike Jordan Laskey

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Palm Sunday

I took our toddler to Palm Sunday Mass solo while Genevieve stayed home with the newborn. Father John, our lovely pastor who impressed everyone by hiring a camel named Ding-A-Ling to make an appearance at the parish for Epiphany, brought in a donkey this time, who led the opening procession down the street and into the church. "Hi, donkey!" the toddler shouted as it passed by.

The donkey — Jenny — was so small that my feet would've dragged on the ground if I had hopped out of the pew and tried to ride bareback. (I did not do this.) I imagined Jesus on a similar little thing, his sandals clipping stones on the Jerusalem road. Almost silly. This is the point, Father John said in his homily: Jesus did not come to town on a mighty steed. He subverts the common expectation that the Messiah would be a triumphant military figure who would overthrow the empire. Jesus' power is in his meekness, a gentle strength that catches us off guard — not too different from the unsurpassable power of a baby's gaze.

Holy Thursday

It's our favorite Mass of the year, but Gen and I will skip it in favor of the toddler's bedtime and the newborn's "please, for the love of God, won't you go to sleep now?" time. Gen jokes that she gave up going to church for Lent this year. She hasn't been able to get there since the baby was born on March 1. Searching for something to at least partially fill the spiritual void, she found "Pray As You Go" online, a daily audio meditation on the Scripture of the day, which she has enjoyed. She doubts she would've sought it out otherwise, and is grateful it exists. Still, it feels like Skyping in to a family meal. The church goes on without her, and she's surprised at how much she's feeling it.

Good Friday

Before the toddler was born, we used to go to a living Stations of the Cross through the streets of East Camden, New Jersey, on Good Fridays. Hundreds of people process through the neighborhood, singing and praying in Spanish and English, with a police escort accompanying the crowd through intersections. Some parishioners dress up as various characters from the Passion story, stopping along the way to act out the stations. The walk takes about three hours, and it's followed by the Good Friday liturgy in church. I was always amazed at how many strollers were in the crowd — it'd be a terribly long, boring day for a kid. Some parents must just say, This is what our community does, we're going. I admire that commitment very much.

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Holy Saturday

This is the official Triduum day for parents of newborns because parents of newborns know all about waiting. We just waited nine months for the baby to come and now it's waiting for her to sleep and waiting for us to sleep, waiting for this cold we all have to leave, waiting for her clogged tear duct to clear up. I am also guilty of anxiously waiting for her to be a few months older and easier. Someone took one look at my bleary face recently and said, "This too shall pass." But the waiting itself is a blessing because it is a reminder that we are blessed beyond measure. I forget this in the moment.

Friends of ours who like reading poetry out loud are staying over Saturday night with their three year-old. It won't surprise me if we end up reading the Vigil's Old Testament passages in our darkened living room after the kids are down, passing a Bible around, reading by cell phone flashlight. This is not something I'd do on my own, but these friends bring out the poetry in people. It's good to have friends who do this. Especially on the most dramatic weekend of the year.

Easter Sunday

We're going to figure out how to get all of us to church for Easter. I would like to make it through the final hymn because "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" is so good, but there are no guarantees. Mary Magdalene, witness of the apprehension and joy of the empty tomb — patron of showing up — pray for us.

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