

A working mom's Holy Week

Heidi Schlumpf | Apr. 23, 2011 NCR Today

There was a time when I did Easter Vigil. The longer, the better (I believe the record was an almost 4-hour service in Pasadena). Vigil Mass was the penultimate spiritual experience, culminating a 40-day journey of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. And Holy Week was retreat-like: Palm Sunday Mass, a Holy Thursday Seder, a Good Friday program at a women's spirituality center. And Vigil, always Vigil.

That was BK (Before Kids). It also was when I worked for church institutions oriented to the church calendar. Now my life is divided into semesters and governed by the timing of two toddlers.

Advent is known as "end of Fall semester" and most of it is spent grading papers and projects. Ash Wednesday sneaks up on me. "Lent, already?" And Holy Week: Let's just say that the non-Catholic university where I teach holds classes for adult students on Holy Saturday.

The two children God has blessed me with also make it difficult to spend much time in formal prayer to Her. The longer Palm Sunday liturgy is too much for my son and daughter, and I would never think of interrupting the solemnity of a Good Friday service with "Mommy, I have to go poopy."

In fact, this year we spent Good Friday (at noon, no less) at a city park Easter egg hunt, much to the good-humored horror of a priest friend. Holy Thursday evening I was teaching, envious of the student who asked to miss class to attend church services.

But we have tried to create our own rituals here in Working Mom Land. I gave up meat for Lent, in part so I could remember it *was* Lent. Our parish offered "Simple Suppers" on Wednesday evenings, and our adoptive families group hosted one. There are some discussions of the Easter story with the kids, although it has caused confusion about whether it's Jesus or the Easter Bunny who brings the jelly beans.

On Holy Saturday my husband and I will have dinner with members of a women's spirituality group that was the center of my life "BK." Breaking bread with these women and their spouses and partners is indeed holy.

And on Sunday at our parish gym Mass, we will sing "Alleluia," as the kids have been practicing. "Spring is sprouting," my 3-year-old says when he sees daffodils around the neighborhood. New life happens, even when maybe especially when life is full.

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