

BOOK REVIEW

The Easter Triduum: A Ritual Pilgrimage. By Donna Eschenauer. San Jose: Resource Publications, 2013. 106 pp. \$21.95. ISBN 978-0-8939-0764-8.

When I, and perhaps others, think of a pilgrimage, I envision leaving the everyday grind behind and traveling to some far away religious destination where I can immerse myself in prayer and visit sites where Jesus, Mary and the saints have trod. For a good number of Catholics, I suppose traveling to a pilgrimage site is too expensive, demands excessive time and effort, and is viewed as something for those a bit “holier” than the average Catholic. Yet deep inside I would venture that even the most nominal Christian has a desire to be some place where they can enter into a deeper relationship with God and come face to face with their deepest longings. In *The Easter Triduum: A Ritual Pilgrimage*, Donna Eschenauer shows us how three days out of the year, three days set apart in our liturgical calendar, offer all Catholics an opportunity to take part in a yearly pilgrimage, not to some far away holy site, but in their own local parish. These three days, the Easter Triduum, and the liturgies that comprise it, lead us, as Eschenauer writes, “on a ritual pilgrimage of hope.... We are pilgrims who travel in the footsteps of a people who tell a story and give witness to surrender, healing, faith, hope and love” (1).

I must admit I was very surprised by this book. I was at first expecting something very scholarly such as a text that might be utilized in a graduate theology class. Secondly, I expected a much larger volume. I was surprised but not disappointed. What I found in the 102 pages of text was a well-researched and concise exploration of the Triduum that will be easily accessible to all parishioners, those with a good amount of theological knowledge and those who are just beginning to explore the Church’s theology and rituals. But unlike other volumes that explore the Triduum, such as Paul Turner’s book, *Glory in the Cross: Holy Week in the Third Edition of the Roman Missal* (Liturgical Press, 2011), or Gabe Huck’s *The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum* (LTP, 1992), two books that masterfully guide people through the rubrics of the Triduum liturgies, Eschenauer presents the material in a way that facilitates thought, meditation, and discussion. She focuses not on rubrics or simply historical facts but on how the Triduum liturgies touch the heart. The bibliography, which includes Turner and Huck, as well as an extensive array of respected liturgical theologians, shows that Eschenauer has researched her topic well. In addition, her style of writing reflects her over 20 years’ experience as a religious educator for both children and adults. This is evident by questions she poses at the conclusion of each

section. These questions are not only useful for individual reflection, but lend themselves well to small group discussion. Eschenauer's experience with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is quite evident as the questions are ones that would be well suited to the period of mystagogy, not only for neophytes but for anyone who would be interested in unpacking the mysteries of the Triduum and delving deeper into the Paschal Mystery. I envision this book being used by parish liturgy committees as they prepare and evaluate their own parish's Triduum liturgies.

In four short chapters, Eschenauer explores four distinct yet connected areas of thought with regard to the Triduum. Chapter One leads readers through a brief history of the Triduum beginning with the influence of the ancient Jewish communities' "struggle to preserve and sustain religious identity" by establishing pilgrimage feasts that are still celebrated today among devout Jews (8). She then leads readers into the development of Triduum from the one great feast of Easter into what we now know as the apex of our liturgical year. This lays the foundation for the rest of the book.

Chapter Two explores "The Work that is Liturgy." Liturgy "connects people to the ever-present mystery of God," writes Eschenauer (19). She then takes her readers through a journey of the development of the reformed liturgy, the importance of active participation, and the ritual actions of the Triduum liturgies. This chapter alone contains sufficient material for a multiple-session discussion group or enrichment for catechists or liturgical ministers.

Chapter Three is where Eschenauer's years of experience as a catechetical leader shines brightly. The liturgy is "the privileged place for catechizing the people of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1074). The Triduum, she writes, by "reclaiming the connection of liturgy and catechesis can enable us to deepen our sense of who we are as a people of word, sacrament and service" (49). She then leads us through the liturgies of the Triduum as people on a journey, again with questions that inspire fruitful reflection on the mysteries presented during these solemn days.

The final chapter connects the liturgies of the Triduum to the concept of social justice. The early liturgical pioneers recognized the strong connection between what happens in the liturgy and justice for all people long before the reforms of Vatican II. Eschenauer writes "The Triduum points toward an experience not only of genuine communion, but full, active participation in the work of justice" (74). Looking at the Triduum liturgies and the implication of the various rituals as actions that lead the community toward service, living a moral life, and recognizing responsibility toward others, the reader will come to understand these actions on a much deeper level. This understanding, if taken seriously, will challenge participants in the liturgies to explore the depths of

external rituals and discover that participating in the Paschal Mystery is calling them to a participation in the mission of Christ.

A common thread running throughout this book is that of living and dying. For faith-filled Christians, following Christ is all about dying: dying to self, dying to those things that keep us away from the path to eternal life. The Triduum teaches us that death leads to life. Eschenauer shows us that as we journey through these three sacred days with a sense of participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we will indeed realize that “everything will be alright,” and that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus (Rom. 8).

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