

Attend Holy Week Services if you have the opportunity.

University of Notre Dame  
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Be in the state of Grace when you leave the campus!

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The Office of Tenebrae.

The Tenebrae is that portion of the Divine Office called Matins and Lauds, which is chanted with great solemnity on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week (The term Tenebrae is derived from the Latin word, meaning darkness).

We know definitely that most of the ceremonies performed by the early Christians were celebrated during the night; for it was only then that they could practise their faith, with the least danger. It is stated that "Tenebrae is in fact the last remnant of the Agape, which was celebrated every evening, followed by prophecies, psalms, and instructions, till after midnight; and then the Eucharist. The Church, however, recognized that, according to the exigencies of modern times, such an arrangement would be inconvenient, and anxious that her children should not lose so spiritual an aid in so solemn a season--by anticipation as it were--i.e. in the evening of the day previous, in order that they may participate.

It is not definitely known when the Office of Tenebrae (as we now know it) originated, but it carries us back to the time when bishops gathered their priests and deacons, together with the faithful, and chanted what we now call Matins and Lauds. The lessons from Jeremias, in the first Nocturn, from the Commentaries of St. Augustine upon the Psalms in the Second, and from the Epistles of St. Paul in the third, are the same as when we first hear of them in the Eighth Century. Each of the divisions of the Office of the Tenebrae is termed a Nocturn, or night prayer. Each canonical hour is ended with the Miserere and with the commemoration of Our Lord's Passion and Death. The Gloria Patri and the Te Deum are expunged; and the whole effect is reminiscent of the desolation of the Church during the sorrowful days of Holy Week.

The most remarkable feature of the Tenebrae is a large triangular candlestick, known as "the Tenebrae hearse," placed on the Epistle side of the altar on which are placed fifteen candles, seven on each side, which are of unbleached wax, and one at the apex of the triangle, which is of white wax. Before the so-called Reformation in England the "hearse" was sometimes called the "Judas," or the "Judas Cross."

Various explanations are offered by rubricists for the presence of the hearse and candles during the Tenebrae.....Honorius Gallus, author of Gemma Animae....says that the candles are arranged along the side of the triangle to represent the Patriarchs and the Prophets who gave to the world the revelation which they had received. This revelation was imperfect, but as time went on each Prophet approached nearer the truth, making the revelation more perfect, and tending towards one point, which was Christ the Messiah. He, as the Orient from on High, was to shed the beams of His knowledge upon those minds which had been so long enshrouded in darkness. Just as these lower candles were extinguished, one at the end of each psalm, so were the chosen ones after having proclaimed the truth about the Redeemer, consigned to death, many of them by the very people whom they had instructed. The White Candle represents Christ. At His death the world was darkened, but only for a time. Just as the White candle is replaced in the candlestick, shedding its brilliant light in the darkness of the church, so Christ, by His Resurrection, returns to a world grown dark by His absence. His return illumined it. Unlike the Patriarchs and the Prophets, He triumphed over the forces of death, and proved He was their God.

Before the lighted candle is returned to the triangular candlestick at the end of the Tenebrae, a sudden noise is made in the sanctuary, symbolical of the confusion of the disciples of Our Lord, the convulsion of nature at His death, and as a signal for bringing forth the hidden candle and the lighting of the lamps in the church.

(Excerpts from an article in the Ave Maria, Apr. 13, 1935, by P. W. Browne.)

PRAYERS: Deceased, Henry G. Clark, old student; William O'Donnell; uncle of Robert Burke (Alumni); uncle of Prof. Bartholomew; grandmother of George Lane (Morrissey); aunt of Bill Phalon (Alumni). Ill, mother of Al Tuohy '31; father of J. Vogel; Dan Leefe; father of J. Sullivan; father of P. Volter; Uncle of B. and P. Bayer. 5 ints.