

Special Sequence before the Gospel during the Octave of Easter

THE SECOND SUNDAY of Easter (also known as “Divine Mercy Sunday”) is the “Octave of Easter,” the eighth day of the Easter celebration. The Christian concept of celebrating feast days as “octaves” most likely grew from the Jewish practice of observing seven and sometimes eight day feasts.

By the fourth century, the feasts of Easter and Pentecost were given “octaves” – an eight day celebration that lasted from Sunday to Sunday. In particular, the neophytes, those newly baptized in the Church, remained in a joyful retreat until the Second Sunday of Easter.

In practical terms, what does this “octave” mean? Each day of the Octave of Easter is as important and carries the same liturgical weight as Easter Sunday itself. ***Each day this week – from Sunday to Sunday is a solemnity.*** At each Mass, the Gloria, the Church’s hymn of praise, is sung or recited. The Gospel verse each weekday mass during the octave is the same: *“This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.”* This proclamation is an important reminder of the central reality of our faith: Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Each day of the octave, it has been an ancient custom to sing the 11th century sequence *Victimae Paschali Laudes*, a poetic liturgical hymn, which many churches recite in English below:

To the Paschal Victim, Christians, offer a sacrifice of praise. The Lamb has ransomed his sheep; the innocent Christ has reconciled sinners with the Father. Death and life confronted each other in a prodigious battle; the Prince of life who died, now lives and reigns. “Tell us, Mary, what did you see upon the way?” “I saw the sepulcher (tomb) of the living Christ; I saw the glory of the Risen One. I saw the angels, his witnesses, the shroud and the garments. Christ, my Hope, is risen; he will go before his own into Galilee.” We know that Christ is truly risen from the dead; O Victorious King, have mercy on us.

The ancient hymn tells the story of death and life locked in a struggle, wherein Christ, the Paschal victim, victorious over death, reconciles us to the Father. It tells the story of Mary Magdalene, who upon finding the empty tomb of the risen Christ and of finding the clothes which once covered his head and limbs, proclaims “Christ my hope has arisen.”