

The *Adoration of the Cross* grew out of a custom observed at Jerusalem and described in the “*Peregrinatio Silviae* (Etheriae).” In the presence of the bishop and the deacons, the people devoutly kissed the Cross on Golgotha, after having bowed to it.¹¹ The Adoration is followed by the touching *Improperia* (reproaches) and the *Trisagion*. This ceremony is concluded with the hymn, “*Pange Lingua*,” composed by Venantius Fortunatus (530–609) in honor of the Holy Cross. The same poet also composed the “*Vexilla Regis*,” which is sung after the Adoration during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament from the repository to the altar. The Blessed Sacrament having been placed on the altar, there follows, in accordance with the “*Ordines Romani*,” the Pater Noster and Holy Communion; later, for the sake of greater reverence, other prayers were added, which gave this rite the appearance of a Mass.¹² The ceremony ended with the ablution. In the Middle Ages the Pope privately recited the entire Psalter—a custom followed by some of the laity,¹³ who also assisted at the “*Tenebrae*.”

Holy Saturday was distinguished by certain peculiarities, apart from the baptismal initiation, which is now-a-days omitted. These peculiarities consisted of the blessing of the new fire and of the candle, and of the Mass, in which certain archaic features were preserved. It was a very natural symbolism that led to the adoption of these ceremonies. The death of Christ, followed quickly by His Resurrection, found an expressive symbol in the fire, candle, or lamp which, being extinguished, can be relighted.¹⁴

The *blessing of the new fire* originated, perhaps, in the ancient *lucernaria*, lamps lighted by the Jews at the close of the Sabbatical feast, and was connected by the Christians with the vigil service on all Saturday evenings. The custom spread from the East to Milan, Spain, Ireland,¹⁵ and Gaul, but was not received in Rome until after the eighth century, together with the “*Laus Cerei*” or “*Prae-*

¹¹ Duchesne-McClure, *l. c.*, p. 259.

¹² Schuster, *l. c.*, II, 220.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁴ Duchesne-McClure, *l. c.*, p. 250.

¹⁵ “It was customary for the Irish, as early as the sixth century, at least to kindle great fires at nightfall on Easter Eve”; Duchesne, *l. c.*

conium Paschale.” In the Eternal City there was originally no candle, no “*Lumen Christi*,” but only a procession “*cum supplicii silentio*,” with one candle set on a reed, and seven lamps. Later on, rites and prayers which were formerly distinct were strangely amalgamated, resulting in the ceremony that we have today, with the one reed and the triple “*Lumen Christi*” preceding the blessing of the paschal candle. Further, the expression in the “*Laus Cerei*”: “*Incensi huius sacrificium vespertinum*,” which simply means the lighting of the candle as an oblation and act of homage to the risen Saviour, was misunderstood and suggested the grains of incense which are now placed in the candle in the form of a cross. Consequently, that part of the paschal vigil in the modern Roman liturgy which precedes the recitation of the twelve lessons, is the result of the fusion of several rites and formulas and their substitution for the original prayer of the “*Lucernarium*,” which, in countries where the Frankish liturgy was in use, marked the commencement of the vesper psalmody throughout the year.¹⁶

After the “*lucernarium*,” or blessing of fire and candle, followed the vigil. It consisted, during the first three centuries, of a series of extracts from Scripture, interspersed with collects and the responsorial chanting of psalms. This usage is still preserved in the *twelve prophecies* which are sung or recited after the blessing of the candle. The “*elect*” (converts to be baptized) were present at these recitals, which were meant to present a summary of the relations between God and man, and to form, as it were, a final instruction for the mystery of initiation. These readings are practically identical in all the old Latin rituals.¹⁷ In the Lateran baptistery the Pope officiated at the Easter baptism, and it was the most imposing of all pontifical ceremonies. Standing by the font, he saluted the congregation and called upon all to join in a common prayer, which was immediately followed by a Eucharistic prayer. These prayers refer to the quickening power of God over the element of water and its purifying qualities in relation to the spiritual regeneration of man.¹⁸ After the bless-

¹⁶ Schuster, *l. c.*, II, p. 254.

¹⁷ Duchesne-McClure, *l. c.*, p. 308.

¹⁸ See the ancient text in Wilson’s ed. of the Gelasian Sacramentary, pp. 84 ff. This Sacramentary contains only ten prophecies.