

ing evening. The matins and lauds of the last three days in holy week are chaunted on the vigils of those days, so that the office for Thursday is performed on the evening of Wednesday, that of Friday on the evening of Thursday, &c. This is the office known by the name of *tenebræ*, or darkness, because towards the end of it all the lights in the sanctuary except one are extinguished. Besides the six large candles on the altar, there are fifteen candles placed on a triangular stand, which are gradually extinguished, producing a darkness emblematic of that which covered the earth at our Lord's crucifixion, and of the profound grief with which the church recalls the sufferings of her Divine Spouse. During the *miserere*, the white candle at the top of the stand is concealed behind the altar, and at the end of the psalm is produced again, to represent the death of Christ, who is the light of the world, and His subsequent resurrection to a state of glory and immortality. To understand the origin of this office, we must go back to the earliest period of the Christian era. For three centuries, the followers of Christ were objects of persecution and lived in concealment, which led naturally to the selection of the night as the fittest time for the celebration of their sacred rites. The office of *tenebræ* is nothing more than a part of the nocturnal prayer of that primitive age. The selections from Scripture which it contains, are full of appropriate and touching sentiment, particularly the lamentations of Jeremiah, in which the prophet pours forth, in a most eloquent and feeling strain, his profound affliction and heartfelt sympathy at the calamities of the unfortunate Jerusalem. What more forcible expression could the church employ for the effusion of her grief at the sufferings of her heavenly Spouse! How could she better awaken in her children a spirit of true compunction, than by giving vent, in the pathetic accents of the prophet, to her deep condolence at the passion of Christ, and to the affliction with which she beholds so many of them insensible to His mercies!

On the morning of Thursday, called Maundy Thursday,\* the church recalls, by the solemn celebration of the mysteries, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which took place on the eve of our Sa-

viour's death. The special commemoration however of this great event, is deferred to another time. During the Mass of this day priests as well as laics all receive the holy communion at the hands of the celebrant, in order to represent more faithfully the occasion on which our divine Saviour administered to His apostles His adorable body and blood. The holy oils, used in conferring three of the sacraments and in various rites of the church, are likewise consecrated by the bishop during the morning service on Thursday, this time having been selected not only for the sake of convenience, that the oils may be distributed for the blessing of the baptismal water on Holy Saturday,\* but also because on this day Christ gave to his church in the institution of the eucharistic sacrifice and sacrament, the most tender pledge of his love, the kindling and cherishing of which in the heart of man is the effect of the sacraments and other observances of religion. At the termination of the Mass, a consecrated host is carried in solemn procession to a throne or repository, where it remains until the service of Good Friday, at which it is consumed by the celebrant, the holy sacrifice not being offered on that day. If the magnificence and splendour which adorn these repositories, are justly expressive of the honor due to the Son of God whom we there adore, they are symbolic also of the pure and fervent homage that we should present to Him, endeavouring to compensate in some measure by the tribute of our constant praise, gratitude and love, for the outrages heaped upon Him by His enemies, and the indignities so often committed by unworthy Christians at the foot of His altar. With the exception of the rites just mentioned, the ceremonial of Thursday relates entirely to the passion of our Lord. From the *Gloria in excelsis* on that day to the same part of the Mass on Holy Saturday, the bells of the churches are silent, in imitation of the silent grief of the apostles at the sufferings of their Divine Master. The blessed sacrament being removed after Mass, the altars are stripped of their ornaments, to express the profound mourning of the church and to represent the abandonment of our Saviour on the cross. Then is performed the

\* From the word *Mandatum* (mandate) with which the ceremony of washing the feet commences.

\* Formerly the holy oils were consecrated on Easter-eve, immediately before the solemn administration of baptism.—*Butler's Feasts and Fasts*, p. 255.