

Inside Easter with B.C.'s Benedictines

*Written by Michael Swan, The Catholic Register
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If you strip life down to its essentials you don't strip out beauty. You produce lives entirely devoted to beauty.

In *This Side of Eden* we're invited into the lives of Benedictine monks at Westminster Abbey in Mission, B.C., during Holy Week. The simplicity of their daily round of work and prayer feeds into the most solemn and significant liturgies of the Christian calendar — Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil.

All this unfolds before the camera in one of the most extraordinary settings. Surrounded by mountains and nestled into the temperate rain forest of the B.C. coast, Westminster Abbey Church is a modern architectural gem constructed in the early 1980s with 7,000 square feet of stained glass. The church and abbey are filled with contemporary frescoes, paintings and sculpture — much of it by one of Mission's monks, Fr. Dunstan Massey.

"We really did want to show their life, and the beauty of that life through the images," said co-director of the Salt + Light Television special premiering Palm Sunday, April 17 at 8:30 p.m. Eastern, 9:30 p.m. on the west coast.

Shot by veteran cinematographer George Hosek, the film invites viewers into three essential elements of life at the abbey — liturgy, work and the surrounding nature. On Good Friday we see the church through thorns on a branch on the ground outside. On Easter Sunday a family of deer step into the garden to munch the monks' flowers.

"We're using symbols," said co-director Marc Boudignon. "You've got the juxtaposition of the supper and setting the table with the washing of the feet (on Holy Thursday). You've got a natural connection there."

Whether it's the Divine Office or any of the Masses, most English-speaking Catholics will find the liturgies recorded here both familiar and strange. The monks use the same Novus Ordo translation into English used in most parishes across Canada. But the 1970s language, frequently derided for being prosaic and flat, is ennobled to transcendence by the prayer of the monks.

The film was never meant to be a comment on the liturgy wars that rage among a small slice of English-speaking Catholicism, said Boudignon. Rather the film makers wanted people to feel the connection between liturgy and life at the abbey.

"We wanted to draw viewers in so they experienced their life," said Harrison.

It's an experience of simplicity and care that unfolds at a slower pace than many of us are used to.

"I clearly remember being at a morning Mass and saying the Our Father. It was so much slower. Their pace of life is just so different," said Harrison.

The film can't help but be structured by the unfolding passion of Christ in the liturgies of Holy Week.

"There's a sort of slow burn until you get to that climax on Easter Sunday," said Boudignon. "What we were trying to show was how the liturgy, how the monks' celebration of Mass, their times of prayer, how it all flows into their work."



A monk prays in the silence of the