

Holy Thursday,
The Stripping

by [Marda Messick](#) in the [March 2024](#) issue

*The Celebrant returns to strip the Altar and
chancel of all ornamentation, recalling the
stripping of our Lord's body at the crucifixion.*

The stripping proceeds without haste.
In this choreography
of total eviction
a bow accompanies each removal
of chalices and fair linen,
candelabra, the historic
embroidery,
the gilded Gospel.

The priest
has handed his scarlet robe
to the vergers.
In the emptied chancel
he pours oil and water
on the undressed altar,
washes naked wood
like a body,
folds himself in shadow.

Lots are cast.
Our hearts are wax.
Eloi, Eloi, save us
from the power of the dog.
We kneel forsaken
until there is nothing for us
but to stagger, speechless,

into the voided
and vigilant night.