

Homily – Holy Thursday C

Holy Thursday marks the beginning of the Paschal *Triduum*, the three most important days in the liturgical year. Jesus spoke concerning the *Triduum* when he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Holy Thursday principally commemorates the fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover through the institution of the Holy Mass or Eucharist. Our Gospel passage (John 13:1-15) proclaims, “Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that His hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.” The Eucharist which Jesus instituted at the occasion of the Jewish Passover is the new Passover Feast. This helps us to understand the place of the Mass in Christian life. The Old Testament Passover was meant to be the most significant liturgical feast for the worship of God: “This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year.” In like manner, Jesus established the Mass as the most important liturgy celebration in the life of God’s people.

Also, the Old Testament Passover was to continue forever, as we read in the First Reading (Exod 12:1-8, 11-14): “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.” This injunction has not changed; however, the new and definitive manner in which it is continued is through the Mass, the Lord’s Supper. Today, therefore, we join the whole Church to relive that moment of all moments when Jesus gave us the Sacrifice of the New and Everlasting Covenant. We celebrate the new way to worship God in a covenant manner.

Our Second Reading (1Cor. 11:23-26) relates how it all happened; how Jesus inaugurated the way to worship God in a covenant manner.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Another significant revelation St. Paul pointed out is the link between Holy Thursday and Good Friday celebration. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” The Eucharist is Jesus himself; it is not a symbol. St. Paul proclaimed the apostolic faith in the real presence, saying, “Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ”

(cf. 1Cor 10:16). It is the real body and blood of Jesus we celebrate and receive. Only Jesus is “The lamb ... without blemish” who takes away the sins of the world. Only Jesus is the Bread come down from heaven. Only Jesus is the Living Bread, which gives life to the world. Only Jesus is the One given up for you, for your salvation.

Holy Thursday also marks the institution of the Ministerial Priesthood. This Priesthood of Christ is superior to the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron and the Levites. Why? The priests of the New Covenant offer, not animals but, Jesus himself in his Body and Blood. Thus, it is inextricably linked with the Eucharist. This new priesthood is “service oriented”. Thus, it is a perpetual indictment to those who look at it and the celebration of Mass as “a secular job” rather than a “vocation to serve” God and His people. Jesus, to show that it is for service, preceded the celebration with the washing of feet ritual. Hence Pope Benedict proclaims that “the priesthood is not a path to prestige; it is a call to serve.”

The washing of feet ritual which we shall re-enact shortly shows us the indispensability of the sacraments and the sacramentals. Many Christians reject the use of symbols in the Liturgy. They maintain that it has nothing to do with our salvation. Give me a break! Now consider how the Lord himself corrected such wrong understanding. Peter had rejected the Lord’s offer to wash his feet, saying, “‘Master, are you going to wash my feet?’.... ‘You will never wash my feet’”. Jesus responded, “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.” Can we see that Jesus says it is not negotiable? If you have no inheritance with Jesus, can you be saved? But why wash the feet of the disciples? Were they dirty? Not at all! Jesus clarified, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow.”

Finally, God has done many good things for us. What is the most appropriate way to say, “Thank you, God?” It is the Eucharist itself. From its Greek origin of the word, *eucharisteo*, which means “Thanksgiving”, let it always remain our ultimate thanksgiving. As the Psalmist rightly anticipated, “How shall I make a return to the LORD for all the good he has done for me? The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.” May our living and perfect sacrifice be pleasing to God through the same Christ our Lord, Amen.