

HOLY THURSDAY B/2006

When people experience important moments or big events in their lives, they like to immortalize them and keep them alive in a perpetual souvenir. A post card, a picture, a ring on a finger, ... reminders of a wonderful place they visited or unforgettable persons whose encounter has determined the course of one's life. A ring, for instance, reminds everyone who wears it of one of the greatest events of his life whose celebration has changed forever the course of his life. For those who look at the ring, from the outside, it is just a piece of metal like any other, it is just a ring like any other; but for anyone who has lived such an event, there is more than a ring, more than a piece of metal.

As St Paul said in the second reading, the day before he died, Jesus was having supper for the last time with his disciples. On that night, at table, he took a piece of bread, he thanked his Father, the almighty, broke it and, then, gave it to his disciples saying: "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". In the same way, he took the cup of wine and said: "This cup is a new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me". As you can see, the logic presiding at the gesture of Jesus is full of meaning. He makes a simple piece of bread stand for his body and a simple cup of wine for his blood. There is here a mysterious exchange and transformation that makes the species of bread and wine the sacramental body and blood of Christ. It means that when the bread and the wine are consecrated, their material reality goes beyond the mere matter and refers spiritually to the upper reality of Christ's body and blood. In this perspective, the bread and wine become an external sign of the hidden presence of the body and the blood of Jesus.

What we receive at the table of the altar as bread and wine is an outward sign of the inner and mysterious activity of Jesus operating within them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to give life to the world. The consecrated bread and wine are sign and reality at the same time; they are a remembrance of the past, but also the making present today of what Jesus has done. In the Eucharist, Jesus is both present and hidden. Not only in the Eucharist but also in the whole of our life, God both reveals himself and conceals himself.

That is the mystery we celebrate in the feast of Holy Thursday. This feast is embedded in the memorial of what God has done for the people of Israel many years in the past, when they came out of Egypt. In that night, the children of Israel were spared from death and destruction, thanks to the blood of the lamb with which they marked their houses. To perpetuate this act of salvation as a sign of his saving power, God instructed and recommended them to institutionalize it for all generations to come. In the same way, Jesus knowing that it was in his bloodshed for humankind that God's new act of salvation was to be realized, he instructed also his disciples, and we alike, to do what he has done the eve of his death in remembrance of him.

What does lie here in the institution of the Eucharist is a profound mystery. The Eucharist expresses the gift of total love for the service of our brothers and

sisters. In a significant act of washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus shows that it is by dedicating our life to the well being of our fellow men and women that we can resemble him. "His actions also hold more than physical meaning. When he washed the Apostles' feet, He became their servant. As he poured out the water over the skin, He purified them, cleansing His disciples of their sins. As He used the towel around His waist to dry their feet, He wiped away any wrong doings, giving them a new beginning. When Jesus asked His followers to "wash one another's feet", He did not mean this only in just a literal sense. He asked his disciples to serve those most in need; to treat everyone as equals, and to bring the Good News to every person without discrimination".

That is why the priesthood, whose institution we commemorate today, which is equally the ministry of the consecration of the body and blood of Christ for the salvation of the world, is first of all, a service and not a privilege. To be priest, then, means to be like Christ, to give up his life for the salvation of our brothers and his sisters. Let us pray today for our priests so that they live by the example of Christ, totally given to others and to the service of God's kingdom. Let us pray for the leaders of our Church that they be guided by the Spirit of Christ in leading rightly and without error God's people to the fullness of salvation. Let us pray for one another that the Lord help us to be at the service of one another.



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