

## **Holy Thursday C/2007**

Holy Thursday commemorates the last supper the Lord Jesus had with his disciples on the eve of his passion and death. This is a significant event that will mark forever the life of the disciples and that of the Church. It is the commemoration of the institution of the sacrament of Holy Orders and the Eucharist, and the memorial of the washing of the feet where Jesus gives a high example of abnegation and service to mankind. Everything that happened that night was of vital importance as an expression of ultimate will of Jesus to his disciples and to the Church. That night, as Jesus gave an extreme example of self-surrendering to the will of his Father and of self-immolation for the salvation of mankind, he left us his body to eat and his blood to drink in order to have eternal life (John 6, 48-58).

Holy Thursday is rooted in the Old Testament, as it refers to the last meal the Israelites had before leaving the slavery land of Egypt under the guidance of Moses. That evening, says Exodus, the Israelites slaughtered a blameless lamb; they applied its blood to the doorpost and the lintel of the houses. In this way, the blood marking the place where they were, their life was spared and their houses preserved when God passed over to strike the Egyptians.

As it can be seen, by placing the Last Supper with his disciples on the eve of the Jewish Passover, Jesus presents himself as the Lamb of God who washes away the sins of the world, and whose body and blood is poured out to save mankind. This reference to the Passover gives to the Last Supper a highly significant meaning. In fact, when Jesus took the bread and gave it to his disciples with the words, "This is my body that is for you", when in the same way he took the wine and gave to them saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood (...) drink it, in remembrance of me", he meant that by celebrating the Eucharist Christians perpetuate in an unbloody manner his sacrifice offered on the cross.

Any time the Eucharist is celebrated, Christ is present sacramentally as the spiritual food of the faithful under the appearances of bread and wine. It is for this purpose that Christ entrusted this sacrifice to the Church so that we may share in it both spiritually, by faith and charity, and sacramentally through the banquet of Holy Communion. In this sense, when we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are always united with Christ offering himself for us as a sacrifice to the Father.

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 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. When he washed the Apostles' feet, he became their servant and gave them an example to be followed by everyone who wants to become his disciple. As he poured out the water over the skin of his disciples, he purified them, cleansing them 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. That is why, when he asked his followers to "wash one another's feet", he enjoined them to dedicate

their life to the service of mankind, to treat everyone as equals and to spread the Good News that all are God's children and the Father loves them.

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 his 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.

**Exodus 12, 1-8. 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11, 23-26; John 13, 1-15**



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