

Holy Thursday A2023

On the feast of the Holy Thursday, we commemorate the Last Supper I Lord ate with his disciple before his Passion and death. At the occasion of the Last Supper our Lord instituted two important sacraments of the Church, namely the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Order or the Priesthood.

The Last Supper is deeply rooted in Jewish Tradition and is connected to the feast of Passover. According to Exodus 12, the night the Hebrews left Egypt, God commended them to sacrifice a lamb, by eating like those in flight, and to apply its blood at the doorposts and the lintel of every house belonging to the sons of Israel.

When the angel of death would pass that night to kill the firstborns of the Egyptians, the Hebrews would be spared. The blood on their doors reminded the angel that they were God's allies. God enjoined them also to celebrate that day as a perpetual institution for the generations to come in memory of their liberation.

It was on the night of the Jewish Passover's celebration that Jesus ate with his disciples for the last time. On that night, what was a memorial referring to the past became something totally new as Jesus identified himself with the lamb of the sacrifice, making the past and the present coincide in his person. St Paul offers a complete account of what happened that night, which has been transmitted to him in the second reading.

Instead of the meat of the Lamb, Jesus took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples to eat after thanksgiving by saying "This is my body, which be given for you; do this in memory of me". In the same way, instead of the blood of the Lamb, he took a cup of wine, blessed it and enjoined his disciples to drink saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you".

At the end of that account (1Cor 11:27), St Paul says, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and the blood of the Lord". Why would it be, then, accountability if we were dealing only with simple bread or wine, as some people pretend?

My friends, when we receive the Eucharistic body and blood, we receive entirely Jesus who is present in them, giving life to the world. To eat and drink at the table of the Eucharist is to receive Christ and to be united with him and to reproduce in our own lives the sacrifice of Christ.

When the bread and wine are consecrated during the Eucharist, they become the body and the blood of Christ in response to Jesus' command "Do this in memory of me". Even though the appearance of bread and wine does not change when they are consecrated, we have in them the hidden presence of the body and blood of Jesus. This is a mystery made present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Only in faith can we approach the mystery of the Eucharist. Human intellect gets us nowhere.

What we receive at the altar, as bread and wine, is an outward sign of an inward and mysterious activity of Jesus operating within them to give life to the world. Whenever and wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, Jesus continues to offer his body and blood in sacrifice as he did two thousand years ago.

The Eucharist transforms us so that we become “one body and one spirit” with Christ. Jesus tells it quite clearly to Peter: “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with him”. The Eucharist drives us toward union with our Lord. It allows us to overcome the barriers between God and man, between us and our Lord, so that we live, not by ourselves, but by him who lives within us. As St Paul says, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2: 21).

In the Eucharist, we have communion with our Lord and unity with our brothers and sisters. In the celebration of the Eucharist, we are united with Christ who offers himself to the Father in sacrifice for our salvation. When we receive the Eucharist, we become one body with Christ as we partake in his body and his blood. He is in us and we are in him. The communion we receive invigorates us so that we are able to continue our pilgrimage until the day we will be received at the eternal banquet in heaven.

However, we are not alone. We are together with all our brothers and sisters with whom we walk this pilgrimage. In all our diversity, we relate to one another around Christ and form one body, which is the church. When Jesus recommends his disciples to wash one another’s feet, following his example, he reinforces our unity with one another whose Eucharist is a true expression. That is why in the Eucharist we are not only united to the Lord Jesus, but also to the brothers and sisters with whom we partake at the same table of the sacrifice of the Lord.

The Eucharist is not only a sacrifice and a sign of our self-surrendering with Jesus to the Father, but also a sign of our unity as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. What does lie 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 his disciples, Jesus shows that it is by dedicating our life to the wellbeing of our fellow human beings that we can resemble him.

That is why the priesthood, which is also the ministry of the consecration of the body and blood of Christ for the salvation of the world, is above all a service. To be priest means to be like Christ, to act like Christ, to live like Christ, to serve like Christ, to give up one’s life for the salvation of one’s brothers and sisters, like Christ.

Let us pray today for all 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 at the example of Christ.

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



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