

Holy Thursday B2024

Let me start this homily of Holy Thursday with an example of life. When people experience important moments in their lives, they like to immortalize them. A picture taken at the occasion of a visit reminds someone of a wonderful place visited in his life. A ring put on the finger of someone reminds him of an unforgettable person whose encounter has determined the course of his 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 might just be a piece of metal like any other or 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.

St Paul says that the day before he died, our Lord was having supper for the last time with his disciples. On that night, as he was at table with his disciples, he took a piece of bread, he thanked his Father, broke it and, then, gave it to them 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."

The logic presiding at the gesture of our Lord 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 our Lord. When the bread and the wine are consecrated, their material reality is transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit and point to the up reality of the body and blood of our Lord, according to the words invoked above.

When the bread and wine are consecrated, they become the hidden presence of the body and the blood of our Lord. What we receive at the table of the altar as bread and wine is an outward sign of the inner and mysterious activity of our Lord 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 our Lord did before his passion and death for the salvation of the world. That is why what our Lord did in instituting the Eucharist two thousand years ago remains connected to all the generations in the present and in the future. In the Eucharist bread and wine, our Lord 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.

The celebration of Holy Thursday is deeply rooted in the memorial of what God did 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 that act of salvation as a sign of his saving power, God recommended them to institutionalize it for all the generations to come. It was at occasion of the commemoration of that saving event for the people of Israel that our Lord instituted the Eucharist. By doing so, our Lord, knowing that it would be in his blood shed on the cross that the salvation of the world would be realized, he instructed his disciples, and we alike, to do what he did the eve of his death in remembrance of him.

What lies in the institution of the Eucharist is a profound mystery. The Eucharist expresses the gift of total love of our Lord for the salvation of the world. In a significant act of washing the feet of the disciples, our Lord shows that it is by dedicating our life to the wellbeing of our fellow men and women that we can resemble him.

That is why the priesthood, whose institution we commemorate today, which is equally the ministry of the consecration of the body and blood of our Lord for the salvation of the world, is first of all, a service and not a privilege. To be priest, means to be like Christ, to give up one's life for the salvation of our brothers and his sisters.

Let us pray today for all our priests so that they live by the example of Christ, totally given to the Church 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 ourselves for a deep reverence for the Eucharist and for the effort 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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