

1 April 2021

Holy Thursday – Mass of the Lord's Supper
Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-15

I have to give thanks that we are able to celebrate this Triduum together, in-person, this year, as we weren't able to last year. We celebrate tonight the institution of the Eucharist on the night before Jesus died, transforming his own impending death into a banquet of love. As Jesus himself gave thanks to God when he instituted the Eucharist through offering his body and blood to his disciples, we join together in giving thanks for this sublime gift.

This past year has deepened our desire, our need, for relationships. To help each other carry our burdens, to know that we are not alone. Holy Communion nourishes those needs: it unites us to God and unites us to each other. It unites us to God in the most profound way possible on this side of heaven, as we take the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ literally into ourselves. It unites us to each other through our shared faith, hope, and love, our shared dreams and frustrations, our shared anxieties and joys.

The refrain for our responsorial psalm was, “Our blessing cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ”, a quote from Saint Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Here, “communion” could also be translated as “participation”: our blessing cup is a participation with the Blood of Christ. So in this statement, Paul means that the Eucharist, the very act of thanksgiving in memory of all that Jesus did for us in his life and ministry, and especially on this evening before his death, the Eucharist enables us to participate in Jesus's very life. Enables us to be his disciples, to be his friends. To share with him, and he with us, all our joys and sorrows, and yes, even our pain and suffering.

We have a deep hunger for the Eucharist, for communion with God, because from it, from Jesus, we draw our very life, our identity, both personally, as beloved children of God, and universally, as a Church.

The Eucharist is remembering together—commemoration—of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Just as the Passover for the Jewish people constituted their identity as God's chosen people, so our communion with the Lord helps us remember who we are. And just as the Passover brought about liberation from slavery for the Jewish people, Jesus’s own passing-over from death to new life is offered to us as well at every Mass.

Our communion with the Lord also consists in our participation in his humble service for others, as he demonstrated with washing his disciples' feet, basically summing up his entire life of service. Remember that John's gospel doesn't explicitly relate Jesus instituting the Eucharist through his consecration of bread and wine. Instead, John portrays Jesus as the humble servant, washing his disciples' feet, not just as a gift for them in that moment, but as another example for us to follow for all time, to do in memory of him.

Vatican II called the Eucharist "the source and summit of the Christian life". We bring everything we are, everything we have on our hearts, to the Eucharist, and from it we receive what we need to live more fully Christian lives. We bring all of our hopes and dreams, our sins and failures, to the Eucharist, and from it we receive what we need to witness to the risen Lord, to strengthen our faith, hope, and love, our joy. Adoration, Communion, and Mission.

We adore and worship God in Mass, and at the end of our liturgy tonight we will have the opportunity to adore him in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the sacrament that will nourish both tonight and tomorrow's liturgy for Good Friday. I encourage you all to stay for at least a few moments, if you can, to remain in that communion of life and love with Jesus.

Our mission as disciples flows from the Eucharist as well, following Jesus's example of ministry. Our liturgy of the Eucharist must bear fruit in our liturgy of the world. Adoration, Communion, and Mission. They're all linked together, and they all strengthen each other. Our adoration strengthens our desire for union, for communion with God, and that communion impels us to share that love with others—our mission. And that mission leads us to encounter each other as true sisters and brothers, each revealing the face of God to us. Which leads us back to worship him, to adore him.

May our celebration tonight and over the next few days strengthen our communion with God and with each other, as we join in Jesus's passing-over from death to new life.