

April 1, 2021, Holy Thursday
Gospel of John 13:1-15
Fr. Brad

Tonight we begin the Sacred Triduum. Over the next three days we celebrate the central mysteries of our faith.

The liturgy tonight centers around four meals:

- i) the **Passover meal** eaten by the Israelites in haste as they prepared to depart Egypt (*an event of the distant past*).
- ii) the **supper** in which Jesus 'took bread' and 'broke it' and said, 'This is my body, which will be given up for you', (*again which happened in the past*).
- iii) the **Eucharistic meal** in which we memorialize this supper by 'proclaiming the Lord's offering of Himself in death for the life of the world (*which we celebrate in the present*).
- iv) the meal that is the **foretaste of the banquet in the eternal kingdom of God**, (*which we look forward to the fullness of, in the future*).

The Eucharistic meal is what brings us together physically (and through livestream) this evening. We gather in solidarity with those who would normally be here with us but cannot because of Covid restrictions. And we stand in solidarity with all of humanity regardless of religion, nationality, culture, state of health (mental or physical), whether close to God or distant, some malnourished physically and some malnourished spiritually.

This is the *Mass of the Lord's Supper*. In it we celebrate the inauguration or institution of the Eucharist. At the time Jesus gathered in the upper room with his disciples that last evening before his death, there was already a history being commemorated at that time. Our Lord integrated the annual celebration of Passover meal integrating the Exodus, the Pascal meal, and entering into a new covenant with God.

Holy Thursday both sustains the memory of the Exodus and the accompanying Pascal meal, and inaugurates the new and everlasting covenant, a covenant between God and humanity in the person of Jesus. The Mass we celebrate tonight is the perpetuation of this mystery. We enter into the narrative ourselves and once again proclaim the Lord's Death and Resurrection.

As we reflect on the meaning of what we have begun in celebrating this Triduum, we recognize that we are all on a journey through this life. This journey is not itself an endpoint. It is a journey that bears similarities to the journey of the Israelites who ate hurriedly that first Passover meal as they prepared to leave Egypt and ultimately, the hope of leaving slavery behind. We celebrate this meal mindful we are on a pilgrimage from a form of slavery to a new freedom in Christ.

All four Gospels have accounts of this last supper whereby the Lord offers Himself to His disciples in the form of the Eucharist. He is the bread of life for all who partake and

thus continue the mission He began for the salvation of humanity. The added feature in John's Gospel is the *washing of the feet* which does not appear in the other three Gospels.

As we reflect further on the washing of the feet, we see once again, a point where Jesus admonishes Peter whose utterance at the thought of Jesus washing his feet might be considered a prideful statement without even realizing it. *'You will never wash my feet'*, Peter says. He does not realize his statement is a form of resistance of Jesus' who is very deliberately performing this act of humble service as a teaching moment they will not understand until later.

He reproves Peter with, *'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'* (Jn 13:8) Remember also that Peter rebuked Jesus when he revealed he must suffer and be put to death? *'God forbid it Lord! This must never happen to you.'* (Mt 16:22) Or when he claims he will follow Jesus anywhere, even if it would mean death. *'Lord why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.'* (Jn 13:37)

Time and time again, Jesus, the Son of God, the one who least needs to humble himself before creation, exercises ultimate humility in order to model for humanity, the disposition we all must learn and practice authentically in order to conquer pride, the great sin of the world. If the Son of God humbles himself in this way, who are we not to? It was deceit and pride that drove Adam and Eve out of the garden. It was the deceitful and prideful prompting of Satan that tried to tempt Jesus in the desert. It is that same deceitful spirit of pride that ruins lives in our world today and has been distorting human relationships from the time of the fall onward. Humanity's lust for power and control over others has damaged and victimized horribly.

By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus dispels pride at its root by emptying himself that we might come to practicing selfless service and the exercising of compassion for those around us.

In our weakened human state, we must navigate through hearts that house both good and evil. There are promptings within our hearts that endorse holiness and the ways of God and nourish the recognition that we are children of God. And there are those promptings that contrastingly, oppose this recognition and instead compound fear, self loathing, and deceit and try telling us we are not good enough. The abuse of power by those who follow this voice instills and perpetuates the alienation of victims of this abuse of power.

It is interesting to note how that voice of deceit works within us. On the one hand, it tells us we don't need God, or that there is no God, we can do it ourselves, but in the same breath, tells us we are not good enough for God. This voice is contradictory and a lie. Jesus came into the world to dispel the lie, to lead us by example through the lies and into the truth. And the truth is that each one of us is the beloved of God and we do not need to live in the dark any longer. Yet to come to this realization may seem impossible to those who have experienced deep trauma and abandonment.

So as we begin this Triduum together, may it be a time when we persevere in reorienting our hearts away from the thoughts and practices that do not include God. May it deepen our awareness of our own brokenness and the brokenness of those around us and our need to tap into that compassion that Jesus models for us and accompanies us in.

The institution of the Eucharistic reminds us that our Lord has kept his promise of being with us to the end of the age, to guide us and strengthen us through Word and Sacrament. May our hearts be thus purified and may we find the freedom to come to share fully in the Divine Love for which we were created in the first place. Amen.