

HOMILY for HOLY THURSDAY – Year ABC

Tonight we celebrate the beginning of Triduum with Holy Thursday. For some Catholics, Holy Thursday is a historic evening because our Lord created the Holy Eucharist & left with His disciples the gift of Himself. As Jesus prepared for His impending death, surprisingly He was not preoccupied about Himself & His misfortunate fate. Instead, He was thinking about His disciples & how they might be able to survive in this world before His return. That is why He left with them the memory of the Last Supper & the Holy Eucharist in the context of the Mass. Without that spiritual nourishment His disciples would not have enough strength to deal with their daily challenges & courage to commit themselves to follow Jesus to the end.

Indeed, the Second Reading for Holy Thursday commemorates the special gift that Jesus left behind for the early Church & future Christians as following, “...The Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread, & after He had given thanks, broke it, & said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper, He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ Every time you eat this bread & drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes!” St. Paul evidently wanted the early Church & the future one to continue to celebrate the Last Supper to keep the memory of their Lord Jesus alive.

Most world leaders have made their citizens/subjects build monuments for them with sweat & blood to remember them. Jesus did not do that. Instead, he broke bread & shared a meal with His disciples. He also asked them to keep on doing that after He was gone to keep His memory alive. By doing that, Jesus wanted His disciples to learn to share & make sacrifices for one another like He did at the Last Supper & on the Cross. In fact, His whole life is about sharing His divine gifts & making sacrifices for His beloved, even His betrayer. He did not harbor ill will against Judas & try to hurt or take revenge against him. Rather, He never failed to pray for the salvation & conversion of Judas.

Unfortunately, some Christians these days have chosen to be selfish & stop sharing God’s blessings for them with the poor & the misfortunate around them. They put their needs before anyone else’s & ignore the plight of the destitute & the lowly. They act like the royalty & make other sacrifice for them instead. They claim that they read the Bible & call themselves Christians, but their words & actions do not look like Jesus’ at all. They do not want to share anything with the poorest of the world like Jesus did at the Last Supper & the Holy Mass. They behave like the rich man toward poor Lazarus without giving him any food & ignore the misfortunate victim of a robbery lying on the side of the road instead of acting like the Good Samaritan. I wonder how Jesus would feel about them on this Holy Thursday & on the Last Day. I hope our Lord would have a little more compassion toward them on Judgment Day than they have shown toward the poor & the misfortunate in this life. For that is what it means to be a Christian. That is the cost & commitment of being a disciple of Jesus. It is not about holding up a Bible or saying a few prayers that would make someone a Christian. Rather, it’s how we follow Jesus’ Commandments of love & treat others with compassion.

Besides the Holy Eucharist that Jesus created & left behind with His disciples, one more important act that Jesus did tonight & asked His disciples to do for one another is to wash the feet of His disciples. When we wash someone’s feet, we show our humility & tender care for that person. It is usually an act of service & devotion that a servant would do to his/her master.

This humble act would typically be done after a long day at work & right before serving a meal/supper. But, on this night, Jesus was the one who did it for His disciples. His humble & caring act surprised all the disciples & was reported in tonight's Gospel as following, "...Peter said to Him [the Lord], 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me....' Then He said to them, 'Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' & 'master,' & rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master & teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.'"

As you can see, Jesus wanted to remind us that He set a role model of service & humility for us to follow by washing the feet of His disciples. Tonight, it should be about taking care of His needs & saying farewell to the Lord. But, Jesus turned the focus on the disciples instead & called on them to follow a life of service & humility. That is why I praise Christians who have volunteered to serve the lowly at God's kitchens & homeless shelters, or who have dedicated their lives to be missionaries across the world. These Christians have truly heeded Jesus' message on this Holy Thursday & tried to keep His memory alive by continuing to wash the feet of the lowly & serve the social outcast. Unfortunately, some Christians have lost their way & demanded others to serve them first. They have put their needs before others', especially the poor & the misfortunate's. Worst yet, they have listened to politicians & followed their selfish & sinful agenda & refused to wash the feet of the social outcast, or serve the poor & the lowly. In fact, they have taken away all the qualified benefits of the poor & declined to share God's blessings for them with people around them.

My dear brothers & sisters, Holy Thursday is the beginning of Triduum – a time for us to give thanks for the gift of the Holy Eucharist & remember the sacrifice He did for us at the Last Supper & on the Cross. He also called us to follow His example of service & humility by washing the feet of others, especially the poor & the misfortunate. If we call ourselves Christians, we must do the same & avoid the selfish & greedy examples of bad leaders in our world. When we do that, we make our Lord Jesus very proud & show the world God's love & blessings for it on the Cross.