

**HOLY THURSDAY; March 28<sup>th</sup> 2024; Cycle - B**  
**Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14' 1Cor. 11: 23-26; Jn. 13: 1-15**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

If we take the Last Supper accounts of the four gospels and that of Paul, we know that three memorable events happened at that celebration, which was also the last Passover Celebration of Jesus. According to the synoptic gospels and Paul Jesus instituted the greatest gift of the Eucharist at his Last Supper. Unfortunately, they give us the shortest account of such a great event. Besides the Institution of the Eucharist, Jesus also instituted the Ministerial Priesthood by commanding his disciples **“Do this in memory of me.”** As we have just listened to John we know that another unique event took place at the Last Supper. Jesus washed the feet of the apostles and thus gave them a great commandment, **“Love one another as I have loved you.”** During his public ministry Jesus repeatedly emphasized the importance of service. We are given the second reading from Paul’s letter to the 1Cor 11:23-26 for the very reason that Paul was the first one to put in writing the account of the Institution of the Eucharist.

When we go through the account of the Institution of the Eucharist in the synoptic gospels, couple questions will arise in our minds. First of all why didn’t the apostles raise any doubt about the abstract saying of Jesus? It is said, “He took the loaf of bread and said, **“Take it, this is my Body.”** Similarly, he took one of the cups filled with wine and said, **“Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”** Even Peter didn’t raise any question. Secondly, why is John silent in his gospel about this great and memorable event?

In order to get the answers of these questions we need to go to the gospel of John chapter 6: 35, 41-58 which is known as **the Eucharistic Discourse** of Jesus. May be, a year before the Last Supper Jesus gave this Discourse. In these verses Jesus explains very clearly the meaning of *the Bread of Life* which is his Body and his Blood. The Last Supper was the time of the fulfillment of his Discourse. In other words, at the Last Supper Jesus showed his disciples in what form he was going to give his Body and Blood. Naturally, at the Last Supper the apostles remembered the words of Jesus in his Discourse. So they were least confused. When John wrote his gospel around A.D. 90 the Eucharistic celebration was very prevalent in the early Church. So John didn’t find it important to repeat the account in his gospel. Secondly he had explained it well in his gospel, chapter 6.

Only from John we have the full picture of the Eucharist. John emphasizes here the importance of eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Jesus. Let us listen to the words of Jesus – “**I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world**”(John 6:51). In the following verses Jesus speaks also about his Blood – “**Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day**”(6:53-54). Jesus continues in verse 57, “**Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.**” At that time Jesus didn’t reveal the practical method of giving his Body and Blood to the people.

Jesus emphatically says that his Body and Blood are the source of eternal life and also eating and drinking his Body and Blood will give us communion with him. That is why the Holy Eucharist is also known as ‘Communion.’ Many non-Catholic denominations argue that Jesus said all these in a **figurative language**, as he said in the parables. But the Catholic Scholars are unanimous over one thing that Jesus never used figurative language or metaphors here. He is very straight forward. For instance, in the Kingdom parables *Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The Kingdom of God is like a drag net..”* Here Jesus does not say that the Kingdom of God is a mustard seed or a drag net. But in the Eucharistic Discourse Jesus says, **I am the living bread**. At the Last Supper Jesus says, “**This is my body and this is my blood.**” *He does not say, this piece of bread is like my body or this cup of wine is like my blood. So the words in the Eucharistic Discourse and in the Last Supper should be taken literally.* The Jews took them literally and that is the reason even many of his followers left him.

St. Paul understood the seriousness of the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ and instructed his community to approach the Body and Blood of Christ worthily. He says, “**Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself**” (1Cor 11:27, 29). So whenever we approach the Body and Blood of Christ we should examine and see how worthy we are to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. If we are in sins, we need to approach the Sacrament Reconciliation. By unworthy reception of the Communion we commit another mortal sin and go out of the church.