

## Homily for Holy Thursday 2013

Ex. 12.1-8.11-14 1 Cor. 11.23-26 John 13. 1-15

Today's first reading from the Book of Exodus speaks of preparing for a journey. The Israelites, the chosen people are leaving Egypt, leaving a life of slavery. Exodus is a Hebrew word which means the "way out". They are on their way out of slavery to the promised land. The meal they eat in preparation for the journey is called the Passover meal. This meal is the preparation meal for their **journey** out of slavery.

We need to pay attention to the details. Such details include; not seasoning the food, they do not use leaven in the bread, The bitter herbs which was used to always remind them of the bitterness of slavery. They ate the "unblemished lamb" which should cause us to think of Jesus, the unblemished lamb who will be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

The cup of blessing anticipates the blood of Jesus Christ which He shed on the cross. Think about the use of unleavened bread and the cup of blessing as they prefigure the Eucharistic celebration. Think of our communion prayer(s), "lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world have mercy on us."

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians gives a history of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Again listen to the words; "on the night he was handed over, took bread and after he had given thanks, he broke it, and said 'this is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" The celebration of the Eucharist from the early Church to now has not changed as this is the point and words of consecration. So at the Last Supper Jesus institutes the Eucharistic feast. The word "do this in remembrance of me," it is here that Jesus made the Apostles priests. So at the Last Supper Jesus not only instituted the Eucharist but also Holy Orders.

In the next verse Jesus says "this cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this as, often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." St. Paul is highlighting The Eucharist as a commemoration of a supreme act of love, which we ultimately see on the cross. This New Covenant of eternal salvation is delivered by Jesus Christ to man. The CCC #73 states that "God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant forever. The Son is his Father's definitive Words; so there will be no further Revelation after him." This New Covenant is an eternal covenant whose fulfillment is destined for heaven.

The Gospel brings us to the washing of the feet. St Thomas Aquinas gives a beautiful description of the washing of the feet. He writes, “when our Lord put water into the basin, this indicated the pouring out of His blood; and when He began to wash the feet of His apostles, this indicated the cleansing of our sins.” St. Thomas identifies three things that should be concluded from the washing of the feet. First, the pouring out of Christ’s blood on the earth is indicated by His pouring water into the basin. For the blood of Jesus can be called water because it has the power to cleanse.

Second when St. John says, “and began to wash,” it indicates our human imperfection. After Christ the Apostles were more perfect than others, and yet they needed to be washed, since they were unclean to some degree. Jesus Christ began to wash because the cleansing of our earthly affections begins here and is completed in the future. The theologian Origen writes that “our Lord begins to wash the feet of His disciples right before His passion, for if he had washed them long before, they would have become dirty again.” The third point is the fact that Jesus took upon himself our punishments; for He not only cleansed us from our stains, but took upon Himself the punishments we deserved. Our own punishments and penance would not be enough unless they were founded on the merits and power of Christ’s passion. This is shown by the fact that He wiped the feet of His disciples with His towel, that is, His body (1 Pet 2.21).

My friends as we celebrate Holy Thursday we too are on a journey. Like those in the Book of Exodus. I told my students that I can write a one word Homily to sum up Holy Week. That word would be LOVE. Jesus loved us so much that he offered Himself for each and every one of us. He loved us so much that He offered Himself for each and everyone of us. His love extends to the Eucharist and all the sacraments in which we receive the graces we need. Jesus the King of Kings, the Son of God lowered Himself to serve not only the apostles but all of us. Now we must turn to that unblemished lamb, with trust and love. We must allow Jesus to abide in us, to accept and use the graces we receive through His sacraments. We must turn our hearts and actions just as Jesus did; we must serve one another, we must evangelize and share His good news, simply put let us love one another as He loved us.