

Holy Thursday A,B,C

Introduction

We are now in the midst of the most Sacred Time of the year for Catholics... and indeed for all Christians.

These are our High Holy Days.

These are the days when we tell the stories that remind us and tell us who we are and whose we are.

Our Society has stories that we get engrossed in – they saturate our air waves and become the subject of our conversations... stories of our celebrities... who is competing on American Idol... recent political battles... These stories tend to clutter our heads and our hearts.

During this Holy Week we tell different stories... We tell our Catholic Faith's most sacred stories that lift our hearts and fill us with hope and love and devotion. It is important that we reflect with love on each of the days of our most sacred season, as we remember the final days of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus. Let us now begin to examine with reverence the sacred stories of this Holy Thursday.

Response.... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

I Readings 1 and 2

The first Reading from Exodus 12 remembers –
brings to our attention once again –
the sacred story of the liberation of God’s people from their enslavement and
bondage in Egypt.

Their deliverance is brought about by a loving God who hears their cries.

They are instructed to kill a year old male lamb,
smear its blood on the doorposts of their homes,
roast and eat the lamb... and be ready to be on their way.

The powers of death will pass over and not touch their homes marked with
the blood of the lamb.

Thus will Yahweh deliver his people.

In the second Reading Paul describes that final dinner Jesus celebrated with
his disciples.

In the course of the dinner Jesus describes what he is about to undergo...

Jesus himself will suffer the powers of death...

his body broken, just like the bread he passes to his disciples...

his blood shed, just like the Jewish Passover lamb...

so that a new people of God could be delivered from their bondage to sin
and the powers of death.

Jesus is now the Lamb of God,

sacrificed for our deliverance from evil and enslavement to sin and the
powers of death.

Paul says:

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the
death of the Lord until he comes.*

This sacred story we recall tonight,

so that we might once again enter into the very life and heart of Jesus...
and we remember what Jesus still does for us to this day...
for Jesus is still delivering us from the powers of darkness and sin...

We also remember *whose* we are... we belong to Jesus...
we are the new people of God,
being formed into other Christs for our world...
we are the Body of Christ in our world today...
as St. Paul so often reminds us.

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II Gospel

Now let's look at the Gospel.

The Gospel has no account of the Institution Narrative...

the story of the bread and wine at the Last Supper.

John's Gospel meditates long and poetically on the bread and wine in
Chapter 6.

At the last Supper John presents us with the sacred story of Jesus washing
the feet of his disciples...

the dirty, dust coated, smelly feet of his followers.

This was the task of a servant, not a Master.

It was a mark of hospitality and welcoming in Jesus' times.

A servant of the Master of the home you were visiting for a meal would wash
your feet.

In John's Gospel Jesus, the Master, washes his disciples feet... This would
have been unheard of – Peter even protests:

Master, are you going to wash my feet?

Peter would have none of it...

wonderful Peter, blustery Peter, humble Peter...

what a lovable guy...

he would not dare let his beloved Master and friend perform such a menial task for him.

But Jesus insists...

Unless I wash you, you will have in inheritance with me. Peter allows it.

When he finishes this servant's task Jesus says:

*Do you realize what I have done for you?
You call me "teacher" and "master," and rightly so,
for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and 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.*

Jesus' whole ministry was one of service.

Now, during his last supper with his disciples,
he gives a dramatic example of service...

And challenges his disciples to follow his example...
to be people of compassion and care,
serving those in need wherever we meet them...

This sacred story tells us how we are to live our lives.

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III Our Story

Let me try to simply sum up what we have learned about the Eucharist this night as we celebrate Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples.

Jesus is the new Lamb of God, whose blood will be shed,
whose body will be broken,
To lead us... the new People of God... out of slavery and bondage...
slavery and bondage to whatever holds us back from being the disciples
Jesus calls us to be.

Jesus shows us how he would have us live and behave as his disciples...
as people who serve others, in compassion and care.

I have given you an example... that you do what I have done.

And isn't that Pope Francis message today.

Francis speaks of the globalization of indifference to the needs of others,
and in his Lenten '15 message he challenges us to combat this indifference
and become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference.

This is such a counter-cultural message about the meaning of life...
our society would have us pursue money, prestige and power... consumption,
acquiring "stuff" – being entertained consumers.
In such a world, so often "anything goes"...
our "feelings" reign supreme,
our "wants" and "desires" are single-mindedly pursued –
even if it means hurting others.

We need Jesus' help to rise above ourselves, our wants, our desires... so
often these hold us in bondage.

We need to be delivered. We need to be freed...

We need to realize that life is about God, not about us.

Life is about relationships and compassion and service,
not about self-fulfillment at any price.

This celebration of the Last Supper reminds us that Jesus came among us to do just that...

By his blood we are healed.

By his wounds we are delivered.

By his love and forgiveness we are forgiven and given new life...

Jesus' life.

And we are called to now walk in his footsteps...

to be other Christ's in our world.

What a "vocation"... what a "challenge"... what a privilege.

Conclusion

Jesus, help us to be the people you want us to be.

In this Mass help us to offer ourselves to our Loving Father, along with you.

We remember your Body broken for us

We remember your blood shed for us

Free us from whatever keeps us from walking in your footsteps.

May we become people of compassion, care and service.

May we become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference.

Amen.

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