

[Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 12:1-15]

Tonight, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we enter into the sacred time of the Triduum (Three Days) – our recollection for the next three days of Jesus' saving life, death and Resurrection. As the Jewish people hold the Passover celebration of the Exodus story as their perpetual institution, so are we Christians called each year to commemorate the sacred events of Jesus' final days on earth – leading to the triumph of His Resurrection on Easter.

Tonight, we recall – with solemnity and gratitude – Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, the ordained priesthood, and the mandate to serve -- on the night before His death. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul recalls Jesus' loving transformation of the bread and wine of the Passover Meal into His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, which will soon be sacrificed for humanity in Jesus' brutal death.

The Catholic Church firmly insists that in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ is indeed present. The elements of the sacrament do not *represent* the Body and Blood of Jesus; they *ARE* the Body and Blood. "This is my body; this is my blood."

Tonight the Church around the world solemnly celebrates this extraordinary mystery: The substance of the bread changes into the substance of the Body of Christ; the substance of the wine changes into the substance of His Blood. We call this Transubstantiation.

Knowing that His betrayer has already left the room and is preparing to hand Him over, Jesus then opens His heart in a remarkable gesture of love for all time. In a very short time, we will be sharing in this love that Jesus pours out for us every day as we come to Mass and receive Holy Communion.

Both the Jewish and the Christian traditions call for more than just rituals and remembrances – as important as they are. The people of the time of Moses were told to eat the Passover meal with their loins girt, sandals on their feet, and a staff in hand, to eat as those who are in flight. Ready to flee Egypt and to face the unknown. We too eat, and in doing so, prepare to become people of action.

And yet all around the world, the Gospel for this celebration is the narrative of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles. John does not record the words of institution of the Eucharist as the other three Gospels do. He focuses on the Master's washing the servant's feet.

The Church's decision to read this account on Holy Thursday must reflect a theology that unites Eucharist and service; it encourages us to become other servant Christs. We are to become what we eat, and what we become through this sacrament of service is the living presence of Jesus Christ as servant of the world. Jesus said to them "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Fed by this Eucharist, we, too, are to be servants to the world.

What specifically can you do? Last fall, when we had our Festival of Ministries, we were able to view all of the dozens of ministries and services provided by the parishioners of St. Martin de Porres. They ran the range of physical, intellectual and spiritual works, depending on our abilities and our availability. They ran the range of something that could be done in one day or one week, or regularly throughout the year. Festival Booklets are still available.

Following the Passover Meal, Jesus, Peter, John and James went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. At least Jesus prayed. The Apostles, probably worn out by the emotional intensity of the evening and a long day, slept. The intensity of Jesus' prayer turned His sweat into drops of blood. Following tonight's Mass, we will process to the parish center for a time of prayer and periods of quiet meditation. We will remain with Jesus as He rests in the Altar of Repose. Let us this night remember the importance of what Jesus did for us and does for us. Let us this night re-commit ourselves to prayer, ministry and service. Let us this night thank Jesus for the gift of His very presence in our lives.

Matthew Kelly, in today's final Lenten reflection says this:

I wonder what the disciples were thinking that Thursday morning. You know, did they just think it was another Thursday? Did they just think it was another Passover?

We've been talking a lot about awareness, as we made our journey through Lent. I wonder what sort of awareness the disciples had. They spent three years of their lives with Jesus. They probably had dinner with Him every night. Did they know this night was different? Did they know this night was special? And when He broke the bread, said the blessing, shared the wine -- what kind of awareness did they have about what was happening? Did they realize they were at one of the most pivotal moments in history? Did they realize they were at the most important meal in the history of the world?

Probably not.

I guess the point is that we can wander through life half asleep. We can wander through life unconscious of a lot of really, really, really important things. And God's constantly trying to wake us up.

And so, as we enter into these very, very sacred days, I think God's probably trying to do the same thing to us. He's probably trying to give us a little shake and say, "Wake up. Pay attention. This is important." And if we do, I think, He always richly rewards us.

So let's let Him shake us, let's let him wake us up, and let's experience these sacred days like we've never experienced them ever before in our lives. AMEN!