

Holy Thursday – Mass of the Lord's Supper A – B – C

**First Reading** Exodus 12:1-8.11-14

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month is to be the first of all the others for you, the first month of your year. Speak to the whole community of Israel and say, 'On the tenth day of this month each man must take an animal from the flock, one for each family: one animal for each household. If the household is too small to eat the animal, a man must join with his neighbour, the nearest to his house, as the number of persons requires. You must take into account what each can eat in deciding the number for the animal. It must be an animal without blemish, a male one year old; you may take it from either sheep or goats. You must keep it till the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the community of Israel shall slaughter it between the two evenings. Some of the blood must then be taken and put on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where it is eaten. That night, the flesh is to be eaten, roasted over the fire; it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. You shall eat it like this: with a girdle round your waist, sandals on your feet, a staff in your hand. You shall eat it hastily: it is a passover in honour of the Lord. That night, I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, man and beast alike, and I shall deal out punishment to all the gods of Egypt, I am the Lord. The blood shall serve to mark the houses that you live in. When I see the blood I will pass over you and you shall escape the destroying plague when I strike the land of Egypt. This day is to be a day of remembrance for you, and you must celebrate it as a feast in the Lord's honour.

For all generations you are to declare it a day of festival, for ever."

**Second Reading** 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me." In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me." Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death.

**Gospel** John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"Never!" said Peter "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me." "Then, Lord," said Simon Peter "not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus said, "No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are." He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, "though not all of you are." When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. "Do you understand," he said, "what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."

**Meditation**

During the institution of the eucharist, Jesus says: "Do this in memory of me." When he washes the feet of his disciples he insists: "As I have just done for you, so you must do." This double command has only one mystery as its object: the memorial of the Lord. After the "Book of Signs" (John 2-12) in which the miracle of Cana served as the first sign, the introduction to the "Book of Glory" (John 13-21) shows how Jesus fully revealed himself at the hour of his passion. This is the revelation of the love God manifested through Jesus. Kneeling like a slave he washes the feet of his disciples. There is an unsuspected profundity for the Christian in this domestic gesture.

When inspired by love, the smallest act of service done for a neighbour takes on extraordinary dimensions. Jesus prefigures the total sacrifice which each Christian must be ready to make and the total communion toward which every Christian must move. Only if we accept a Christ who is willing to serve to the point of death can we be awakened to an authentic spirit of poverty.

With our eyes opened to the needs of our brothers and sisters we will become, like Jesus, active contemplatives. "We are not merely uttering pious platitudes, fit only for Sunday sermons, when we say that the Church must not be concerned with serving others merely for the sake of proving her own claims and that she must stand by the side of the poor, the oppressed, life's failures.

But does the reality correspond to this sacred principle, the principle that the Church has to be there for all and therefore also for the others, that she must serve even those who attach no importance to her and regard her as a relic from a vanished age? Is this form of the 'folly of the cross' very much in evidence among us? Is enough love applied in the Church, is there enough courage for stubborn confrontations, and are enough power, time, and money given to unselfish service for others, without calculating the advantages to the Church herself? There are of course miracles of love and unselfish service among us and perhaps others are no better on the whole. This, however, does not prove that the Church is wholly the unselfish servant for the welfare and salvation of the others and that we must not always be asking anxiously whether we are not fearfully introverted, concerned more for the Church than for others; it does not relieve individual Christians of the obligation to protest boldly in certain circumstances, even against the office-holders of the Church, when the Church thinks more of herself and tries to save herself otherwise than by saving others."

(Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, 1974)