

## Holy Thursday Theological Reflection

Some time before this Passover night, before Jesus went up to Jerusalem and after his disciples came back excited by the wonders they had done in Jesus' Name on the mission He had entrusted to them – proclaiming the Good News, seeing people respond, healing the sick and casting out demons – they also reported to Jesus that people thought He was John the Baptist, or the prophet Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or even Elijah come back to life from the dead. Jesus asked them all – as He does to us tonight – Who do you say that I am?

Simon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus called Simon blessed, that the Father and not flesh and blood had revealed this to him, and He gave Simon a new name: “And I tell you, you are Peter (the rock, Rocky), and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death or hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Mt 16:19-19

First, Jesus declared to the 12 that He would do these things, and it is on this night that He does them. At the Passover Meal, Jesus fulfills the Jewish Ritual by revealing that He is the true Lamb of sacrifice anticipated by the Passover Lamb, a sacrifice to save his people not from slavery to earthly powers but from spiritual slavery to sin and the fear of death, to save them not from physical death, but from death of the spirit from sin and separation from God.

Secondly, Jesus reveals that the purpose of the sacrifice He is about to make of his life the following day – on what we now call Good Friday – is so that the life He has with the Father in the Holy Spirit might be given to us as spiritual food for our journey of faith through life every day until his glorious return at the end of time and empower us to live as God's children in the world. The form Jesus gives to this sacred meal by which He gives us a transfusion of divine life is the bread and wine of the Jewish Passover Meal which He transforms into his living Body and Blood.

Some theologians say that the Apostles didn't receive Holy Communion at the Last Supper because Jesus was bodily with them and not yet risen from the dead, but we don't know for sure. We do know that as soon as they repeated Jesus' Sacred Meal after his Resurrection they did experience Holy Communion with Jesus, and we continue to do so ever since then.

Thirdly, while Jesus instituted the sacrament, the mystery of Holy Eucharist on this night; He also simultaneously instituted the sacrament, the mystery of Holy Orders. He gave the eleven – Judas was no longer in the room – his authority or power to repeat the Holy Eucharist in memory of Him, and every time, Jesus speaks and acts through them, bishops and priests, to transform the bread and wine into his living Body and Blood, He who in his glorious humanity now dwells forever in the bosom of the Father and at his right hand in heaven yet remains at the same time ever present to us on earth until the end of time.

John at the beginning of his Gospel declares that creation came into being through the Word, the Son of God, whom we know as Jesus, and that nothing has been made without Him. The Son of God, the Word, who at the will of the Father created the universe, can also change bread into his living glorious Body and wine into his living glorious Blood; so that we might have Holy Communion with Him in the Holy Trinity. Jesus chose to give us the Holy Eucharist only through his Apostles and their successors through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Fourthly, Jesus commanded them to conduct themselves and serve his people in his Name through fraternal charity, which He exemplified by washing their feet. The significance of this night is that Jesus conceived his Church by simultaneously instituting the Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders, and by demonstrating his command to live and practice fraternal charity. He built his Church as he said He would on the profession of faith of Simon Peter and He empowered the eleven to continue building up his Church through the Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, and fraternal charity.

The Church of Jesus – all of us in every generation – were conceived by Jesus on this night, and gestated – carried by Jesus in his womb – through the 40 days He appeared to them and taught them after his Resurrection until his Ascension; when He gave them and the other disciples his great commission to go out into all the world, proclaim the Good News to all the nations, make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that He has commanded.

The Church continued to gestate for 10 more days as they all obeyed Jesus command by gathering around Mary and praying, waiting for the promised gift from above of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came down upon them at Pentecost, Jesus gave birth to his Church in one great and spectacular act of giving birth and the Church that we are and will be until Jesus returns in glory became visible and active in the world, developing until today.

When we stop to reflect on the great, mysterious, and wondrous things Jesus did on this night, and when we look at his chosen Apostles, we also see ourselves. They have questions and are uncertain and Jesus has to reassure them.

Jesus demonstrates to them that the gift of his life that He will give the next day and that He has given them in a ritual way by fulfilling the Passover Meal and changing of bread and wine into his Body and Blood – all that He intends in laying down his life for them and for us – is a gift of love, of loving and humble service, which makes visible on earth the love of God the Father in heaven.

Despite the wonder of such a gift, in addition to seeing the other Apostles uncertain, we see Simon Peter resisting Jesus, as he has done in the past. Peter often has opinions that conflict with what Jesus says, teaches, or does. We also resist Jesus, all of us, in various ways at all the changing seasons of our lives. We are unhappy about God’s response to our prayers, or what seems to us to be a delay in his response.

Priests, deacons, and lay people at times are unhappy with their bishop, and bishops can be unhappy with their people. Parishioners can be unhappy with their priests and priests with the people. Some would like to see priests marry or women become priests, some are unhappy with “old men” leading the Church and some are unhappy with their children, with youth or children. Spouses can be unhappy with each other, parents with their children and children with their parents.

It is true: we don’t treat one another with fraternal charity as Jesus commanded us to do and as God the Father desires. Men don’t always cherish women as we ought to do because of their generous self-giving and nurturing of life in everyone around them, and women don’t always support and encourage men to rise to the occasion of life’s challenges and the fullness of their responsibility to lead by example.

Pope John Paul II gave us wonderful insights into the gift of women in his Letter to Women, on our human struggles in On Human Work, and in his letters on the vocation of the laity and on the family.

All men are called to cherish women and support them in developing into the fullness of their womanhood and call to give and nurture life – not only in children but in countless ways – and all women are called to respect and support men in developing into the fullness of their manhood and call to be there and give leadership by witness and example in the face of all the pressures of human society.

Both men and women are called to see each other as better than we are, so that in seeing reflected in the others’ eyes an image of ourselves as better, we might rise to the occasion and be encouraged to in fact become better, to strive to become that better self, that better me, strengthened by the love we receive to not be afraid to give ourselves in a return of love and live our lives as a gift in imitation of Jesus.

In the Church, Jesus exercises his leadership and lordship as Saviour, and Teacher in the unity and peace given and cultivated by the Holy Spirit given by Him and the Father. Jesus orchestrates among us a harmony and balance between the hierarchical gifts of the Spirit – given through Holy Orders – and the charismatic gifts of the Spirit – given through Baptism and Confirmation.

For each of us, our experience of God’s love and the Holy Trinity living within us begins and is formed initially in our Family, whose strength is the presence and power of God’s love in the sacrament and mystery of Christian Marriage.

On this night, Jesus asks us to renew our resolve to welcome in the unity and peace of the Spirit both the hierarchical gifts of the Spirit in Holy Orders and the charismatic gifts of the Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. Jesus calls us to love one another and serve one another in humble and fraternal charity that puts Jesus first.