

## REFLECTION ON THE HOLY THURSDAY LITURGY by Fr. Tom

On Holy Thursday evening we traditionally begin the TRIDUUM (the solemn 3 days) of Holy Week, during which we celebrate the principal mysteries of our salvation. In a sense we are liturgically present with Jesus and the Apostles at the Last Supper. We recall, with them, the history of how God saved his people from physical slavery in Egypt, as well as how the destroying angel "passed over" the home of the Hebrews, which were marked with the blood of the paschal lamb.

We are also present at the Last Supper as Jesus took a cup of wine, blessed it, and said: ***"This is my blood of the New and Everlasting Covenant. It will be shed for you and for many, so that sins may be forgiven."*** The blood of the lamb, in the Old Testament Passover account, freed the people from physical slavery. In the New Testament Christ's Precious Blood frees the people from the spiritual slavery of sin. And Jesus emphatically said: ***"Do this in memory of Me."*** St. Paul reminds us of the fact that every time we celebrate these words and celebrate the Mass, we celebrate our redemption. He tells us: ***"Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes."***

But, during the Last Supper, Jesus also did something else. He WASHED THE FEET of his apostles. In doing so, He gave a powerful example of Christian service, as well as the correct way to exercise authority. We are a "Eucharistic People". We receive Christ in the Eucharist precisely so that we can -- in turn -- share this presence thru our service to others. Someone once remarked: "Eucharist begins when we step outside the Church after the Mass and begin bringing Christ's presence to others." At the Last Supper Peter was shocked that Christ, their Lord and leader, wished to wash their feet. Jesus uses this incident to powerfully teach a very important lesson about authority. He points out that true Christian authority is an opportunity of serve, to be in the truest sense, a "public servant." It is the opposite of secular society's concept of the exercise of power. Elsewhere Jesus points out: ***"You know how those among the Gentiles, who seem to exercise authority, lord it over the others. Their great ones make their authority felt. It cannot be that way among you. Let the one who would be first among you serve the rest."*** So, as Jesus washed his disciples feet, He taught them a very important lesson through both word and example. He told them:

***"Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord' ... and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet, then you must wash each other's feet."***

On a number of occasions Jesus pointed out that the entire Law and Prophets could be summed up in the two great commandments of loving God and Neighbor. This love for God and Neighbor must, of necessity, issue forth in service to each.

After Jesus had graphically demonstrated his service to neighbor in the washing of feet, He then headed out to the Garden of Olives, where He would demonstrate, in an equally graphic way, His absolute service to God the Father. He said, in the midst of his agony and fear of what was to come: ***"Father, please take this cup (of suffering) from me, yet -- not as I will, but as You will."***

Even though this year, due to the Coronavirus, we are unable to publically participate in the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we can still receive the Eucharistic Christ in a spiritual way through prayer. I invite you to recite the following:

### ***PRAYER OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION***

***My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from you.***

Holy Thursday is also a day in which we should implore God's guidance and help to become better servants to all we meet, remembering Jesus' description of his purpose during his life on earth: ***"I have come not to be served, but to serve...to give my life for others."***