

HOM Holy Thursday C 2019

As you know, at the Last Supper, Jesus instituted two sacraments for His Church. The first is the Most Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood -- what we also call the Eucharist or Holy Communion, The second is the Sacrament of Holy Orders by which men become deacons, priests and bishops. (Holy Orders was the focus of this morning's Chrism Mass.)

The institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper – with its completion being the Death and Resurrection of Jesus – was well known by the time the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel was written by John, probably in the 90's. So, in his Gospel account, John focused on the reality of Christ's substantial presence in the form of bread and wine and also on the absolute necessity of Holy Communion in order to stay united to Jesus and to be conformed to Him.

John did this in Chapter Six of his Gospel account, called the *Bread of Life Discourse*, and also in Chapters 13 through 17 which detail Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper, minus the so-called Institution Narrative found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

St. Paul's account of the Last Supper Eucharist Institution Narrative, which is today's second reading, is the oldest of the institution narratives, written some 15 years before the first Gospel was written.

Going back to John's Gospel account, from which today's Gospel reading is taken, it should also be pointed out that the Gospel according to St. John is the only one in which Jesus is referred to as the *Lamb of God (1:36)*. This is important because it connects the sacrifice of Jesus to the Passover Supper & Sacrifice in the Old Testament which is recounted in our first reading.

The point is that the Old Testament Passover Lamb – a year-old male without blemish, whose bones were not to be broken as it was slain, and whose Blood spread over their doors saved the Israelites, and whose flesh was to be eaten in the perpetual annual Passover Meal – prefigures Jesus who is the actual Lamb of Sacrifice. He saves the willing who partake of His Body and Blood, which fills us with His Holy Spirit and unites and conforms us to Him. The Mass, which is offered 24/7 around the world, is the new perpetual Passover commemoration.

With this background and context, the meaning of Jesus washing His Apostles' feet can be better understood. It makes a connection between the Eucharist and concrete service to others, even suffering service, which our Eucharistic oneness with Jesus leads us to and enables.

However, Our Lord's words to Peter also make clear that His washing of the Apostles feet is something more than what meets the eye. Although it is a gesture of hospitality, the kind of service offered to traveling guests upon their entry into house of the host, it is also something more.

*“Master, are you going to wash my feet?”* Simon Peter asked. Jesus answered: *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later....”* *“Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me....Whoever has bathed...is clean all over (except for his feet); so you are clean, but not all.”*

That Simon Peter and the others will come to understand only later what Jesus is now doing for them – and that His washing of them is necessary so they can have a place with Him in the Father’s House – makes clear that this washing of their feet symbolizes a complete spiritual cleansing that will come from His Death and Resurrection. And that what He is doing for them, they must do for one another and others. *“I have given you a model to follow,”* Jesus says to them, *“so that as I have done for you, you also should do.”*

So, the bottom line for us is that if we partake of the Eucharist, we are to serve others both concretely and spiritually. Our concrete service to others – for their temporal good -- should also in some way facilitate their entry into the Father’s House i.e., their getting to Heaven. It should also include the spiritual cleansing of their hearts. What that means is that it should help them give themselves more completely to God’s will.

Jesus said that Judas was not clean because his heart was set on his own will and not God’s. The Apostles are already clean, but not completely, because their hearts, while set on the Father’s will with Jesus, are not yet completely given to God’s will unto the Cross. Jesus will give them the means for this after He does the Father’s will unto the Cross and Resurrection. He will give them the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of His Body and Blood so they can be untied and conformed to Him in this. They must then do this for each other and for all, so that all the willing can join in Jesus’ saving sacrifice of obedience and love.

The example of this that comes to mind is from my own experience but is probably common to many of you. During the 13 years that my Dad had dementia, Mom took care of Him and for much of this time. she bathed him, and occasionally, I also cleaned him up and helped in other ways.

Six months before Dad died, my Mom started to have dementia which worsened over the next 14 years unto her death. And for the last several years of her life, I helped her to sponge bathe each day and soaked her feet in a pan of warm, soapy water before putting her to bed.

This was done out of filial duty and love, but none of it was easy. It was concrete suffering service over a span of 27 years. But even more important than the physical dimension of it was the spiritual dimension. Everything – including the daily heartache of seeing my Dad and then my Mom decline so utterly in every way – became part of my Eucharistic Self-offering for their sanctification and salvation. In fact, that Cross continues -- as it must for all of us who voluntarily join in Jesus’ saving sacrifice – in other forms until the end of our lives on earth.

But have no doubt, brothers and sisters, that our Eucharistic self-offering for the sanctification and salvation of those we hold dear – and all whom the Father holds dear – is efficacious. It helps to bring about not only the purification of own hearts, but of those for whom we offer ourselves.

Once again, as always, I invite you to join me in invoking Mary’s help in doing what Jesus did and commanded us to do in the exercise of our common baptismal priesthood. Just pray these familiar words silently at Holy Communion, and sincerely strive to live them out: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER.