

Homily of Holy Thursday, 2026

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

Holy Thursday begins the three days of liturgical celebrations which re-enact the three days of Jesus' passion, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. The three days are called the Sacred Paschal Triduum. The word paschal originates from the Aramaic 'paskha' meaning passover. Triduum is a word formed from two Latin words: 'tri' meaning three and 'dies' meaning day.

Holy Week Wednesday is sometimes called Spy Wednesday. It is so called because Judas Iscariot had become a spy for the chief priests. He had received thirty pieces of silver from them and was seeking an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them (Matthew 26:14-16). We are not to be like Judas who spied and betrayed Jesus. We are invited to look out for, care for, protect, and support the well-being of one another. We are invited to be faithful and honest with one another.

Three major events took place on Holy Thursday:

The first event: During the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Catholics believe that Jesus celebrated the first Holy Mass on Holy Thursday. The second reading says, "The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). By Jesus' proclamation, "This is my body," "This is my blood," Catholics believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament because Jesus did not say, "This is a symbol of my body," or "This is a symbol of my blood." He did not say, "This represents my body," or "This represents my blood." The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus said what he meant, and he meant what he said.

The Holy Mass is, also, the highest prayer of the Catholic Church. Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (No. 11) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Nos. 1324 and 1327) teach that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life," and "The Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith."

The second event: On Holy Thursday, Jesus instituted the ministerial priesthood (the Sacrament of the Holy Orders) when he commanded his apostles, "Do this in remembrance of me." By this, the apostles became the first New Testament priests. Subsequently, the ministerial priesthood (validly ordained priests) function in the person of Christ ('in persona Christi'). That is why Catholic priests repeat the words of Christ during the prayer of consecration of bread and wine at Mass; and during the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest prays over the penitent "... through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins..." However, through our Baptism, we all are incorporated into the Body of Christ and share in his three-fold mission as priest, prophet, and king. By this, we share in a common (universal) priesthood and a life of service and witness. This is why we are called priestly people.

The third event: Holy Thursday is also called Maundy Thursday, which can be translated as Command Thursday or Mandate Thursday. The word 'maundy' is derived from the Latin

word 'mandatum,' meaning mandate. Jesus commanded the apostles and us, "Do this in remembrance of me," and "You call me teacher and master, and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:13).

The Eucharistic command and witnessing command are among the final demands of Jesus before his crucifixion. They are commands that are to be obeyed as stated! We are commanded to wash each other's feet. We are called to wash real dirty feet. The dirtier the feet we wash, the deeper our relationship with God. Washing of feet means witnessing Christ.

The first reading narrates the feast of the first Passover, which symbolized the spiritual food for the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. The Eucharist is our spiritual food for our journey of faith and our journey to eternal life. Jesus says, "My flesh is real food, and my body is real drink" (John 6:55).

God commanded the Israelites to put the blood of the lamb on the lintel of every house in order to be saved from the angel of death. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and has purchased us by his blood. St. Paul writes, "In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). In prayer, we surrender ourselves, our sins, and our sorrows to the redemptive power of the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. May the precious Blood of Jesus save us from angels of death. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP