

Homily of Holy Thursday, 2025

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. 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).

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. We read in the second reading, "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.

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, "Do this in remembrance of me." However, we are all "priestly people" (1 Peter 2:9) as we partake in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Jesus commanded all of us, "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 non-negotiable but to be obeyed as stated!

The priest used to end the Eucharistic celebration with the Latin words, *Ite missa est*, translated, “Go, it is the dismissal.” A more meaningful translation of *Ite missa est* is, “Go, you are sent on mission,” the mission of witnessing. Catholics call the Eucharistic celebration ‘Mass,’ derived from the Latin word *missa*, a catch word in the Latin dismissal farewell.

Acting *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), after each Eucharistic celebration, the priest recommissions everyone to go and 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