

Homily
Holy Thursday - B

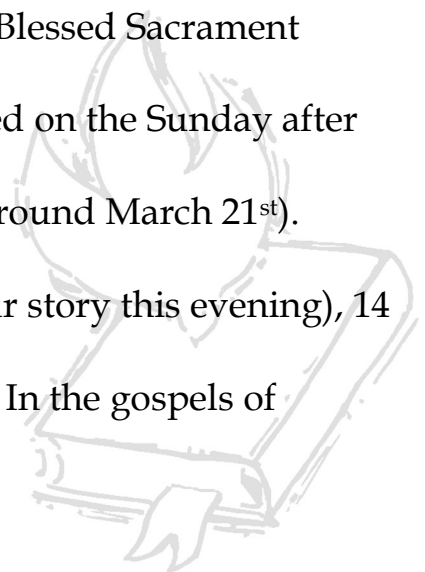
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 01, 2021

Ex 12: 1-8, 11-14
Ps 116: 12-13, 15-16, 17-18
1 Cor 11: 23-26
Jn 13: 1-15

If I were at the University of St. Francis tonight, teaching my students about Holy Thursday, the key phrase for this evening would be “14 Nisan.” As we learn about the Jewish faith, the month of Nisan is the seventh month of the civil year for the faithful of this religion and culture and the first month of the springtime planting.

During the time when the barley starts to grow ripe, the whole idea of 14 Nisan is associated with the moon and the planting season. In the Catholic faith, Jesus often is associated with the moon; the monstrance we use for benediction is shaped like a moon, with the rays of the monstrance “shining forth” the presence of the Blessed Sacrament within. For Catholics, Easter is usually celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon *after* the first day of spring (around March 21st).

In the gospel of John (from which we take our story this evening), 14 Nisan is the day when Jesus dies in the gospel. In the gospels of



Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we learned that Jesus died one day *later* than the gospel of John. For John, the afternoon of 14 Nisan (the hours prior to the Passover), was the time when young baby lambs were being slaughtered in preparation for the Passover feast; John wishes to connect Jesus' death to the same time those baby lambs are slaughtered.

For Matthew, Mark and the gospel of Luke (as well as in the first letter to the Corinthians, which we just read tonight), this perpetual sacrifice that Jesus offers us connects the Last Supper to the Passover Feast, an event that Jesus wishes us to commemorate, to celebrate, every time we gather around this table for this sacrament.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, we learn that this Passover Feast that Jesus most likely celebrated recalls how God led the chosen people out of the land of Egypt in the Book of Exodus and how God protected the chosen people from the death of their firstborn sons, a plague that God inflicted on the Egyptians for not allowing the chosen people to leave Egypt.

We are told in this story from Exodus that if the chosen people wished to have their children spared, they were to take the blood of that

baby lamb, smear it on their doorpost on the appointed night and, if God saw the blood of the lamb on the doorpost, God would “pass over” the house and the oldest male in the family would be spared.

We also learn at this feast tonight that Jesus is the last lamb that needed to be sacrificed, the last lamb of God offered for the sins of the world. With Jesus’ sacrifice at this table, no other sacrifice would be needed.

John takes this story one step further. Instead of focusing on the supper as a Passover Feast, John chooses to focus on Jesus washing the feet of the disciples as an example of service – as God has done for us, so we do for each other. This last week, the kids of St. Anne’s Church learned about serving others by wandering through their neighborhoods the afternoon of Palm Sunday, stopping at parishioner’s homes to drop off different food and gifts from the parish. The kids at St. Anne’s wanted to tell the folks of the community that they very much cared for them, that they wanted to make this sacrifice for them to model the example of Jesus in today’s gospel.

For this reason, we commemorate this supper we celebrate as a

Memorial, as a perpetual sacrifice to remind us that Jesus constantly and perpetually offers his life for us, to remind ourselves that every Holy Thursday and every time when we gather for this Mass, Jesus models the depths in which he was willing to offer his life for us.

We learn especially today that Jesus was willing, *God* was willing, to get on his knees and wash our feet. As we read in the second chapter of Philippians from Palm Sunday...

... though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Today's gospel reading focuses on Jesus offering that last supper,

Jesus offering the last and greatest Passover, the great Exodus meal, that begins a sacrifice that is fulfilled on the cross. We learn tonight that if we follow Jesus's example, if we sacrifice in the name of Jesus, if we live in the name of Jesus, then we are made clean. Tonight's meal requires us to understand what Jesus has done to learn from this example and to do for others as Jesus has done for us.

Now, normally on a Holy Thursday service, after the homily, the priest would take off his vestments. He would put it out and an apron, and like our Lord had done. He would get on the jeez and wash the feet of 12 individuals in our community. However, because of COVID, we are not able to do this. Perhaps tonight we can focus on other forms of service in the name of the Lord. Perhaps we can pick up a rosary or a prayer book and direct our attention to God, praying for the members of our families, the members of this community, those who are sick, those who have died or those who need God's love. We can do all kinds of things to model this example, but it does require a sacrifice on our part.

We must remind ourselves of what Jesus did for us. On 14 Nisan, Jesus died while baby lambs were slaughtered; Jesus was the last lamb

of God necessary for the sins of the world. Let us realize his sacrifice what Jesus did for us, let us realize what we must be willing to do to follow that example so that we may do the same for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.