

HOMILY FOR HOLY THURSDAY -  
THE EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER  
Thursday, 6 April 2023

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day  
Part Two: reflection on the readings  
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY  
Lectionary: 39

Reading I Ex 12:1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,  
"This month shall stand at the head of your calendar;  
you shall reckon it the first month of the year.  
Tell the whole community of Israel:  
On the tenth of this month every one of your families  
must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.  
If a family is too small for a whole lamb,  
it shall join the nearest household in procuring one  
and shall share in the lamb  
in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it.  
The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish.  
You may take it from either the sheep or the goats.  
You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,  
and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present,  
it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.  
They shall take some of its blood  
and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel  
of every house in which they partake of the lamb.  
That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh  
with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

"This is how you are to eat it:  
with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand,  
you shall eat like those who are in flight.  
It is the Passover of the LORD.  
For on this same night I will go through Egypt,  
striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,  
and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!  
But the blood will mark the houses where you are.  
Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;

thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,  
no destructive blow will come upon you.

“This day shall be a memorial feast for you,  
which all your generations shall celebrate  
with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”

Responsorial Psalm Ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18.

R. (cf. 1 Cor 10:16) Our blessing-cup is a communion with the  
Blood of Christ.

How shall I make a return to the LORD  
for all the good he has done for me?

The cup of salvation I will take up,  
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.  
Precious in the eyes of the LORD  
is the death of his faithful ones.

I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;  
you have loosed my bonds.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.  
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

My vows to the LORD I will pay  
in the presence of all his people.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Reading II 1 Cor 11:23-26

Brothers and sisters:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,  
that 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.”  
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Verse Before the Gospel Jn 13:34

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:  
love one another as I have loved you.

Gospel Jn 13:1-15

Before the feast of Passover,  
Jesus knew that his hour had come  
to pass from this world to the Father.  
He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.  
The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the  
Iscaiot, to hand him over.  
So, during supper,  
fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power  
and that he had come from God and was returning to God,  
he rose from supper and took off his outer garments.  
He took a towel and tied it around his waist.  
Then he poured water into a basin  
and began to wash the disciples' feet  
and dry them with the towel around his waist.  
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,  
"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"  
Jesus answered and said to him,  
"What I am doing, you do not understand now,  
but you will understand later."  
Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."  
Jesus answered him,  
"Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."  
Simon Peter said to him,  
"Master, then not only my feet,  
but my hands and head as well."  
Jesus said to him,  
"Whoever has bathed has no need except  
to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over;  
so you are clean, but not all."  
For he knew who would betray him;  
for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet  
and put his garments back on and reclined at table again,  
he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?  
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."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Tonight, we commemorate the Last Supper of the Lord. Before entering into his passion and death, the Lord celebrated the Passover supper with his disciples.

In their account of the Last Supper, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke tell us words that are very familiar to us,

While they were at supper,  
He took bread and said the blessing.  
He broke the bread and, giving it to his disciples, said,

Take this, all of you, and eat it.  
This is my body which will be given up for you.

These words, spoken at mass, are known as the "words of institution" - the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Tonight's Gospel, however, is from the Gospel according to John. The words of institution are glaringly absent from John's account of the Last Supper. Instead, we are told how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples.

The evangelist knows what he is doing. He knows that the absence of the words of institution would be obvious to his readers.

John is saying something of great importance to the Church. He is showing us that our service to one another - the way we humbly wash one another's feet - is nothing less than a Blessed Sacrament.

This is a teaching that we must learn again and again. We must teach it to our children. We must inscribe this teaching in our hearts.

On this Holy Thursday, let me offer a brief reflection on service and charity as a spiritual practice that must remain at the heart of the life of the Church.

When we practice charity toward our neighbors, I think that it is better to give many small amounts rather than one large amount. The reason is that, by doing so, we get lots of practice being generous.

My point is that it is not sufficient to perform acts of generosity toward our neighbors every once in a while. We must strive to become generous persons. We must become persons who embody the virtue of charity in our souls.

For, it is our soul that must change, and to accomplish this, I recommend that we practice little acts of generosity and kindness every day. We must dedicate our lives to simple, unassuming acts of generosity toward our neighbors - and toward total strangers as well. And we should do this every day.

In the transformation of our hearts, our lives with one another will become a communion - indeed, our lives will become a Holy Communion.

Remember, the words of institution are absent from the Gospel of John. Instead, he tells us that Rabbi Jesus, our Lord and Master, got down on his knees and washed the feet of his disciples.

In humble service to one another, we find a holy communion.

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Esta noche conmemoramos la Última Cena del Señor. Antes de entrar en su pasión y muerte, el Señor celebró la cena pascual con sus discípulos.

En su relato de la Última Cena, los evangelios de Marcos, Mateo y Lucas nos dicen palabras que nos son muy familiares,

Mientras estaban cenando,  
Tomó pan y dijo la bendición.  
Partió el pan y, dándoselo a sus discípulos, dijo:

Tomen y coman, todos, de esto.  
Este es mi cuerpo que será entregado por Uds.

Estas palabras, pronunciadas en la misa, se conocen como las "palabras de institución": la institución de la Sagrada Eucaristía.

El Evangelio de esta noche, sin embargo, es del Evangelio según Juan. Las palabras de institución están notoriamente ausentes del

relato de Juan sobre la Última Cena. En cambio, se nos dice cómo Jesús lavó los pies de sus discípulos.

El evangelista sabe lo que hace. Sabe que la ausencia de las palabras de institución sería obvia para sus lectores.

Juan está diciendo algo de gran importancia para la Iglesia. Él nos está mostrando que nuestro servicio mutuo, la forma en que humildemente nos lavamos los pies, es nada menos que una santa comunión.

Esta es una enseñanza que debemos aprender una y otra vez. Debemos enseñárselo a nuestros hijos. Debemos inscribir esta enseñanza en nuestros corazones.

En este Jueves Santo, permítanme ofrecer una breve reflexión sobre el servicio y la caridad como práctica espiritual que debe permanecer en el corazón de la vida de la Iglesia.

Cuando practicamos la caridad con el prójimo, creo que es mejor dar muchas pequeñas cantidades que una gran cantidad. La razón es que, al hacerlo, obtenemos mucha práctica en ser generosos.

Mi punto es que no es suficiente realizar actos de generosidad hacia nuestros vecinos de vez en cuando. Debemos esforzarnos por convertirnos en personas generosas. Debemos convertirnos en personas que encarnan la virtud de la caridad en nuestras almas.

Porque es nuestra alma la que debe cambiar, y para lograr esto, recomiendo que practiquemos pequeños actos de generosidad y bondad todos los días. Debemos dedicar nuestras vidas a actos de generosidad sencillos y sin pretensiones hacia nuestros vecinos, y también hacia los extraños. Y deberíamos hacer esto todos los días.

En la transformación de nuestros corazones, nuestras vidas entre nosotros se convertirán en una comunión; de hecho, nuestras vidas se convertirán en una Sagrada Comunión.

Recuerden, las palabras de institución están ausentes del Evangelio de Juan. En cambio, nos dice que el rabino Jesús,

nuestro Señor y Maestro, se arrodilló y lavó los pies de sus discípulos.

En el humilde servicio de unos a otros, encontramos una santa comunión.

### PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as "a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys"). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually "reading" the Bible. Rather, we are "listening" to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the reflection on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?