

Holy Thursday: Mass of the Lord's Supper - B

On this significant night of the Church year we recall two extraordinary acts that Jesus performed on the night before he died.

In the tradition that Paul quotes and which is found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the emphasis is on Jesus as gift: "This is my body that is for you."

In his Gospel St. John present Jesus as giver: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

In both of these acts, we are given an invitation to respond. How will we do so?

The first act of Jesus can be seen as an invitation to contemplate what it means to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

It is more than an invitation to share some food in a religious setting, and it is not about eating to our own satisfaction. We consume the Body of Christ and are consumed by it. We become what we eat, in the most sacred sense of those words.

As we incorporate the Body and Blood of Christ into our very selves over the course of a lifetime, we also choose to be incorporated into the life of Christ.

As Catholics, we believe that as we take into our bodies the consecrated bread and wine, we also take into ourselves the essence of Christ.

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As we say “Amen” to “The Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ” we pledge our willingness to be taken into the Body of Christ, the Church, and to reveal the life of Christ to others.

To take in and be taken into the Body of Christ is to share ever more deeply in the healing, forgiving, loving ministry of Jesus. I invite you to spend some time in adoration this evening after Mass pondering that great mystery.

This leads us to the second great act of Holy Thursday: the washing of the feet of the disciples. Jesus is not only gift, but giver. He gives example and the model is service.

We know it is not enough to consider the life of Christ dwelling within us as a prize to possess. The gift is not given for our own enlightenment, although that is a happy consequence.

Personal salvation has never been the point of Christianity. Jesus came to be the salvation of all humanity, us and others included.

Once we have been given the life of Christ, we are immediately impelled by the Spirit to respond to the gift in service. Only in this way can we share that life with others.

There is really no limit on how this sort of service can be carried out, so long as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

I was taking communion to the volunteers in the soup

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kitchen the other day, and after everyone had received, we were chatting a bit about the patrons. You know, over time, the volunteers and the patrons get to know one another pretty well, and yet there are always surprises.

One of the patrons, I can't remember his name, had a reputation for being a bit confrontational at times. And someone noted that recently he had settled down quite a bit. Then one of the volunteers shared an exchange that she and he had had that she thought might have had something to do with it.

He said to her while going through the line one day that, "You all get paid big bucks for doing this." That was a surprising comment, and she was taken aback a bit. She responded simply, "We don't get paid for doing this." She didn't get snippy about it, but just stated the fact.

He appeared astounded. Apparently, he had not imagined that he was experiencing simple Christian service with no strings attached. Following the example of Jesus still has power to change people's hearts. I would even venture to guess that more conversions have been accomplished by good example than have been by good preaching.

What we celebrate this evening can really be seen as the liturgical embodiment of Jesus' two-fold commandment of love:

Love of God by wanting to be united with him in the way he has marked out for us: "Do this in

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remembrance of me.”

Love of neighbor by simply making ourselves available to attend to their needs, as we are able, with no strings attached.

Repeat until he comes again.