

Holy Thursday

The Passover of the Lord

Tonight we begin the Sacred Triduum: three days that form one feast, the feast of the Lord's Passover from death to life, the feast of our Passover from sin to grace. This evening we remember the Lord's Last Supper when he instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood. And this evening in imitation of Jesus' selfless service for his disciples, I will wash the feet of twelve of parishioners. Then, after we have received the Eucharist, we will bring the Blessed Sacrament in solemn procession to the altar of repose, recalling how Jesus went from the upper room to the garden of Gethsemane to prepare for the suffering that lay before him.

The Eucharist we celebrate this evening has its origins in the Passover Supper the people of Israel celebrated every year to commemorate the Angel of the Lord "passed over" their homes that were marked by the blood of the Paschal Lamb and spared their first born.

Jesus celebrated this feast on the night before his own death. Gathering his chosen disciples, he and they ate the paschal lamb in remembrance of how God once saved their people. But toward the end of that meal, as he anticipated his death, Jesus gave this meal a new meaning. Taking bread, giving thanks, and breaking it, he identified the bread with his body that would be given for us. Then taking the cup filled with wine he identified the wine with his blood that would be

poured out for us. And so Jesus established a new covenant in his blood. He became the new paschal lamb whose blood saves us from sin.

Jesus' "Passover" from death to life is our Passover as well. Each time we celebrate this Eucharist, we are intimately united with the Lord's Passover. Each time we celebrate this Eucharist we enter into this great mystery that foreshadows our own Passover from death to life. What we celebrate this evening is not a mere remembrance of the past; it is a sharing and participation in the very Passover of the Lord. With Christ we die to the power of Sin and Death that would rule over our lives. With Christ we rise to a new life marked by Jesus' selfless service to others, a life in which service is more important than power, love is more powerful than hatred, a life in which we live in communion with Jesus and each other.

The days of this Sacred Triduum are a powerful reminder of what is most important about our faith. More than a reminder, more than a reenactment of past events, it is the way we share and participate in Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection. As I wash the feet of parishioners this evening, let each one of us commit ourselves anew to a life of selfless service to each other. And as we receive this Eucharist, let us enter into the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection: death to the power of Sin over our lives, resurrection to the newness of life that Christ makes possible.