

Holy Thursday 2020

Tonight we begin the Triduum. Triduum is a word we don't use every day. Triduum means a "three day" day. Similarly the Easter Octave is an "eight day" day. The Christmas Octave is an "eight day" day. And for some during this pandemic, every day seems like an "eight day" day. So tonight - Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper, tomorrow - Good Friday's Commemoration of the Lord's Passion, and Holy Saturday's Easter Vigil is one day, one liturgical celebration. And this year, without all of you present, this year will be a Triduum we will never forget.

You will notice tonight that there is no ending to the Mass. There will be no final blessing. Father Roy will not say, "Go forth, the Mass is ended." Has nothing to do with the pandemic. There is never an end to the Holy Thursday Mass. Rather, we will adore our Blessed Lord in the Blessed Sacrament until Midnight. And at Midnight, there is no final hymn. We will just walk away.

You will notice, tomorrow, Good Friday, at the Commemoration of the Lord's Passion at 3:00 p.m., there will be no beginning. We will not start with the Sign of the Cross.

We will continue in silence with the prostration of the clergy. And tomorrow, there will be no end. There will be no final blessing, no “Go in peace.” After the Prayer after Communion, the clergy and the altar servers leave the sanctuary “without procession,” the Roman Missal says. We just walk away.

You will notice on Holy Saturday there is no beginning. There will be no Sign of the Cross. The liturgy under ordinary circumstances, would continue with the lighting of the Easter Fire. This year, we will process with the Easter Candle, but there will be an ending.

This is the Church’s way of saying we have begun one long Mass, which begins tonight and does not conclude until we celebrate Our Lord’s great triumph over sin and death in His Resurrection on Holy Saturday night and Easter Sunday morning.

Tomorrow, Good Friday, is the only day of the year when it is forbidden to offer Mass. Rather tomorrow, we will pull back the veil from the cross, and we will just stare and contemplate the reality of Jesus Christ crucified for us. Jesus on the cross because He is willing to be there. You cannot nail the One who made the stars to a cross unless He wants to be there. As Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “No one takes my life from

me. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again.” (JN 10:18) I am there, nailed to a cross, because I want to be, for you.

Tonight is Holy Thursday and tonight has a threefold focus:

1. The institution of the priesthood
2. The great gift of the Eucharist,
3. And the command from Jesus in the Gospel, to love as He has loved, hence the washing of the feet, which we will omit.

First, a short word on the priesthood. Earlier this week, on Monday night, Father Roy and I, and all the priests of the Diocese offered a private Mass. At what is usually a “Solemn High Mass” if I may use the term used years ago, this private Mass was stark. Just Father Roy and I. We listened to the Bishop’s homily on my phone. We renewed our priestly vows. We were reminded of the responsibilities that we have to conform our lives to Christ. St. John Chrysostom, a great saint who lived long ago, said, “I am talking about an office (the priesthood) which demands the virtue of an angel.” I do not have the virtue of an angel. And neither does he (pointing to Father Roy).

As Fulton Sheen once wrote:

Every priest who has ever sat in the confessional box and heard the confessions of saintly souls and has given absolution to those who he knew were more holy in the eyes of God than he, knows this distinction between the man and his office.

But we aspire to it, at least on our better days. So pray that we aspire to it, as we were ordained, not for us. We were ordained for you.

Second, the Eucharist. Father Michael Keating gave a talk on the five wounds of the modern mind. In his brilliant talk, Father Keating said something in particular regarding the Eucharist. He was speaking how we have lost a sacramental vision of reality, meaning that what I am seeing is limited to what I am seeing. That's it. It's just a thing and there's nothing more. Father Keating went on to say that's not true. That's never true. Everything we see is always more than what it looks like. Sitting next to you on the sofa, or across the room from you is a body, but a body is more than a body; it is the person who is sitting next to you. It's more than what it looks like. All of reality is like that. And so it is with the Eucharist.

Alarming statistics say that something like 60 percent of Catholics do not truly believe in the body, blood, soul and

divinity of the Eucharist, that, stated simply, the Eucharist is Jesus. The Eucharist is God. And the response is one of, “Wow, we really need to teach that.” Father Keating said that’s not the problem. It’s not that the people haven’t heard it. At least at St. Mary of the Lakes that’s not the problem. The Real Presence is constantly taught here. The problem is they’ve heard it. They just don’t believe it. And they don’t believe it because they fall into the mindset that what I am seeing is limited to what I am seeing. Looks, feels, smells and tastes like bread. It must be bread. No.

Everything that we see is more than what we see. The host is soooo much more than a piece of bread. We don’t have a perpetual adoration chapel so we can perpetually adore a piece of bread. We adore Jesus, God. The stars in the sky are so much more than stars. They point to God who made them.

Keating’s way of thinking is tremendously helpful when it comes to understanding the Eucharist. And the Eucharist, for us, becomes the key for us believers to understand all the rest of reality, so that when we look at each other, we are seeing men and women who are created to share in God’s own life. As CS Lewis said, “Outside of the Eucharist, the holiest thing you will ever see is another man or woman,” because every

man and woman is destined to share in God's own life. Every man and every woman is more than just a body.

Which brings me to my third point, the washing of the feet, which is metaphorical for confession, the forgiveness of sins.

In the passage of the "Washing of the Feet," Our Blessed Lord speaks to Peter, and the word "clean" occurs three times:

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."

Our Blessed Lord is speaking to Peter, who denied him three times. Each and every time we sin, we deny, just as Peter did. "For he is clean all over" refers to Baptism. And since the Apostles were followers of John the Baptist, they were baptized. As was Jesus. But even the baptized sin. So Jesus washes their feet.

Each time we sin, venial or mortal, we betray, we deny. So for now, follow the advice of Our Holy Father Francis regarding confession during this pandemic:

People who cannot get to confession because of the coronavirus lockdown or another serious reason can go to God directly, be specific about their sins, request pardon and experience God's loving forgiveness, Pope Francis said. "This is the right time, the opportune moment. An act

of contrition done well, and our souls will become white like the snow.”

Then, when social distancing is lifted, come to confession.

When Jesus first called His disciples, he asked them, “What are you looking for? What do you want?”

Tonight it’s the same question. We will be in adoration until Midnight. So go to your favorite place to pray. I asked you to find that place in my homily last Friday.

“What do You want?” But in “this” question, the “You” is Jesus. Jesus, what are You looking for from me? What do You want me to do, You who have become man, who have lived our life, who have gone to the cross and all that it involved? What do You want from me? Clearly, it’s to be more than just an observer. He’s looking for us to make some concrete decisions to be closer to Him during His Agony in the Garden, during this Agony of Coronavirus. If nothing else, I am sure He is asking all of us to trust in Him, to place your loved one who has been diagnosed in His arms and in the arms of His Mother. He is asking all of us to trust in Him, to place whatever it is you are worried about, your business, your nest egg, whatever, in His hands, in the hands of His Mother. Jesus, through Mary, I trust in You.

Tonight has no ending. Our Blessed Lord will be there til Midnight. So pray. Or go into the kitchen, get a bite to eat, put the kids to bed, and come back and pray. Ask Him the question, "Lord, what do You want from me? What are You looking for me to do? What is Your word to me tonight? Is that word "Trust?"