

“Give us this day our daily bread.” These words of Christ, which he taught his apostles when they didn’t know how to pray, seem particularly important this Holy Thursday. The evening of Thursday during the Holy Week is the time when we remember and celebrate the establishment of the Eucharist and the beginning of priesthood in the Catholic Church. Two sacramental gifts offered to the Church by Jesus Christ on his way to the cross.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” It’s a beggar’s plea for food. It’s a request for a gift that is so basic, so fundamental and so powerful, that it gives life. Since the first Holy Thursday, Christians realized that this plea for bread is a human plea for the true Bread of Life, the Body of Christ. This begging becomes even more desperate this year

The paradox hidden in this prayer from the beginning is also even more visible this year. The paradox is this: we are begging for bread of life, but it is not God who refuses to offer it to us. It is our decision not to receive it, because we are sick. We recognize our deep and dangerous sickness that makes us afraid of God, of each other, and often of ourselves. That’s the moment when we don’t receive God’s bread of life. We are learning this year, in a very painful way, that coming back to receive our daily food will not be just an administrative decision of any authority. It will not be a simple matter of re-opening restaurants and grocery stores. It will require healing. Firstly, it must be the internal, personal healing of every one of us. Secondly, it must be the healing of trust in each other and in the things that we are to eat. The unexpected metaphor of Lent of 2020 becomes a powerful catechesis about the nature and the goodness of God who offers Himself always and who goes out of his way to make us capable to receive his gift. This necessary healing can be offered only by Christ.

Holy Thursday provides a particularly good opportunity to celebrate in your home. The liturgy of this evening reminds us of the upper room that was chosen by Christ to celebrate Passover with His disciples. Passover is a family feast. During this traditional and predictable annual meal, the disciples realize that instead of the customary lamb consumed, to commemorate ancient liberation of Israel, they are really receiving Jesus, the True Lamb, who liberates every one of them. Only made free from the slavery of sin can they love God, trust Him and receive his gifts.

As usual, I would like to propose a model of celebration that we borrowed from the great resources of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Now a word about the priesthood. The gift of the sacrament of priesthood offered to the Church is particularly generous on the part of God. Even if, sometimes, it is hard to see because of the people who carry it. The meaning of the gift is powerful: God sends his Spirit to celebrate the mysteries of Christ through human gestures and words. He wants that celebration to last forever among his people. Every aspect of this celebration, every part of it, is a symbol. It builds mysterious connection between God and man. It remains, however, the mystery to every one of us, ordained or not. I was made aware of it by a simple poem by Polish poet-priest, Fr. Jan Twardowski. It sounds more or less like this (in my personal translation):

I am afraid of my priesthood,
my priesthood scares me deeply,
before my priesthood I fall in the dust
and before my priesthood I kneel.

On the July morning of my ordination,
for others probably gray,
Some overwhelming power
was suddenly born in me.

And whenever I ride on a crowded bus,
or run with a crowd on the streets,

I still cannot stop wondering
over my soul's mystery."