

Holy Week 2021

April 1, 2, 3, 2021

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Holy Thursday

Drawing on the leadership of Pope Francis, faith formation consultant Joe Paprocki entitled one of his recent books, *A Church on the Move*. In it, he reimagines a Church where we ‘get mission and mercy in motion.’

Implied in Paprocki’s 52 short chapters is his belief that the Church needs to undergo a transformation if it wants to be effective in the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world. Some of his cleverly named chapters include: ‘from complacency to urgency,’ ‘from a learned faith to a lived faith,’ ‘from aiming to please to remaining true to our identity,’ ‘from paternalism to empowerment,’ ‘from passivity to processions,’ ‘from indoctrinating to instigating,’ ‘from saying prayers to praying always,’ ‘from talking at the world to interacting with the world,’ and ‘from maintenance to mission and mercy.’ In each chapter, he points to where the church has become stagnant and suggests ways for it to become more dynamic. Like Pope Francis, he envisions a church on the move!

In this evening’s liturgy, we celebrate the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, recalling the Last Supper, the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died upon the cross. While the Last Supper is the foundation for the Catholic Mass, it is also connected to the previous celebration of the Passover meal.

In our First Reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear about the details of the original Passover Meal. One detail mentioned in particular is this: “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.” That very night, the people of God would sneak out of their slavery in Egypt and begin their long journey to freedom. They were instructed by God to eat and run.

While it is bad etiquette to eat standing or to eat and run, the posture of this original Passover meal is a great symbol for us as Christians. As Christians, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we can't get too comfortable or settle in here because we are going to be sent by God right back out into our daily lives. It is not a coincidence that we do a lot of standing at mass!

At the Last Supper Jesus not only said, ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ in reference to the bread and wine, but also “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” in reference to the washing of the feet. This second command is just as important as the first.

Whenever we come to mass, we receive the Body and Blood of Christ as a Church on the move.

Do I see the Church as so stable, unchanging, and stationary that I have a hard time putting the Gospel into?

Let us pray that we may be a church of worship and of service.

Good Friday

Human dignity is a core principle in Catholic Social Teaching. It refers to the fact that each person is created by God and loved by God. Therefore, they have dignity just by existing. While this principle is easy to accept in theory, it becomes much harder in practice. This is because we often make ourselves the reference point for what it means to be human.

There are many examples of us missing the human dignity of others because we are making ourselves the reference point, but here are a few:

- 1) Those of another culture: Anytime we come across someone who looks or acts differently than us, we usually assign them partial value. Remember in our history as a nation when we thought that an African American was 3/5th a person or how to this day we assume that people of color should be able to handle more pain than reasonable?
- 2) The homeless: Anytime we come across someone who doesn't have a roof over their heads, we usually assume that they are lazy or addicted. Why don't they get a job or learn to take better care of their bodies?
- 3) The elderly: Anytime we come across the elderly, we have to remind ourselves that they exist, as we usually forget about them. Why should we even waste our time visiting nursing homes or the homes of elderly family members?

These are just a few examples, but we can see that whenever we make ourselves the central reference point of humanity, we will look right past those who do not fit our mold, lifestyle, or appearance.

In our First Reading from Isaiah, the prophet, speaking of the suffering servant of the Lord, says, “so marred was his look beyond human semblance,” and “there was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him.” As Christians, we believe Isaiah was speaking in reference to Jesus. If that is the case, chances are we would not have recognized the human dignity of our Lord if we were bystanders at his passion and death on Good Friday. We would have seen him as a criminal, a religious heretic, or an unpatriotic revolutionary. Like the crowds, we might have even shouted, ‘crucify him!’

As we consider Jesus’ ugly semblance, un-stately bearing, and bloody body upon the cross today, let us make Jesus Christ the reference point for humanity by learning to see human dignity in each and every suffering person.

Holy Saturday

According to Christian theology, we are all born with original sin. This means that we are born into a sinful world and are guilty of some offense against God from day one. The cure to this curse is to accept Jesus Christ as our savior by being baptized. Through baptism, we are buried with Christ, as St. Paul tells us in Romans. Only then, after coming out of the water as like a second birth, are we a new creation.

The doctrine of original sin is a good reminder that all of us are flawed. No matter how far back we go in time, every single person in history (except Jesus and Mary) have committed sins against God, others, and ourselves. All of us need mercy, healing, and forgiveness.

While not dismissing original sin or the need for mercy and redemption, there is one major problem with this theology. We are forgetting tonight's First Reading from Genesis 1-2. In the creation story, as God created, God kept saying, 'this is good, this is good, this is very good.' This is much different than saying, 'this is bad, this is bad, this is very bad.' If our creation and the creation of the whole world is good, then goodness precedes badness. Goodness is more foundational and original than sin.

As Christians, we believe that good not only comes out of bad, but that good also proceeds bad. We got the first part down pretty well. We know that the death of Jesus on the cross led to his resurrection on Easter Sunday. We know that God brings good out of evil. But we often forget the first part. We forget that we were good before we were bad. We forget that there is nothing intrinsically disordered about how we are created. If both of these are true (that

good comes out of bad and good precedes bad), then sin, evil, badness are surrounded on all sides by goodness. It is only a matter of time before they have to surrender.

We need to have more trust in the power of our goodness and not be too entrapped by our sins.

Do my sins prevent me from seeing the goodness God has created in me?

This Easter, we celebrate Jesus Christ rising from the dead. To him, death surrendered and is defeated. Let us anticipate even now the day when that will happen for us.