

## Homily for Holy Thursday

This past Sunday – Palm Sunday – as we waved palms in the air, just as the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem did nearly 2,000 years ago, I mentioned that during Holy Week, we don't simply recall the past, or even try to dramatically recreate it. Rather, when we truly celebrate these historical events, we actually enter into a mystical act of remembering – of anamnesis – of allowing God to make present now for our salvation what actually happened then. Therefore, this week isn't so much about history, as it is about mystery – “The mystery of faith” we acclaim during the Eucharistic Prayer: “When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.”

Certainly this mystical act of anamnesis takes place in this evening's Mass of the Lord's Supper. And St. Paul, in our second reading tonight, speaks to this. He said, “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread...broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And the same with the cup of His precious blood – “Do this in remembrance of me.” Again, this word “remembrance” translates that Greek word ‘anamnesis’ – remembering back in such a way of actually making present now once again.

And are we simply making present that Last Supper when Jesus first said those words? No, for as St. Paul said, “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over...” On the night Jesus was betrayed – that is, on Holy Thursday night – after Jesus had first washed His Disciples’ feet, and then celebrated the Passover with them at the Last Supper, He went out into Gethsemane, near the Mount of Olives, where He was handed over to the Romans by Judas Iscariot. And then His Passion began, culminating with His death on the cross. In other words, in offering up on Holy Thursday His very Body and Blood under the forms of bread and wine, Jesus was forever joining this Eucharistic sacrifice with His sacrifice on the cross. And what we celebrate tonight in a unique way is what we celebrate at each Mass – namely, in doing this in memory of Him, the very sacrifice of Calvary is given to us by the Father anew. Not sacrificing Jesus again and again every time Mass is offered. Rather, in mystery, we enter into that one historical moment at Calvary, so that the gift of our salvation is made present again for us in this time and place. And what do we call Christ’s sacrifice for us on the cross? Mercy. God’s divine mercy – by which He doesn’t give us in justice what we rightly deserve; but rather, that, which is so much more than we could ever merit. On the cross, God’s justice and mercy meet, and the price of eternal, exacting justice was paid for by the total mercy of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice. It is that same sacrifice we receive in an unbloodied form in the holy Eucharist.

But our faith in Jesus is not only about what He has done for us. Rather, it is also about what He desires to continue doing through us. For as Jesus said in the Gospel passage we just heard tonight, which again took place right before the Last Supper: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” In other words, that mercy that we receive in the Eucharist, is not merely meant for me and for my salvation and sanctification. Rather, as the season of Lent has reminded us for the whole of our lives, it’s about taking the mercy that is lavished upon us by our merciful Father, who forgives us the debt of our sins, and then extending that mercy to others. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” And this brings our whole celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy into focus. We plead the mercy of God. We receive the mercy of God. And we share the mercy of God. God bless you.