

Fr. Jeff's Weekly Homily

Holy Thursday 2008

March 20, 2008

READING 1: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution.

Psalm 116

Our blessing cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

READING 2: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For as long as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

GOSPEL: John 13:1-15

“Do you realize what I have done for you?”

In tonight's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, “Do you know what I have just done for you?” How would you answer? They knew their Messiah had washed his disciples' feet. But they didn't know what was coming. They didn't know that he was about to be betrayed, arrested, tortured, crucified for them. But we do know the whole story. He told the disciples that he had set an example. He wanted his disciples to do what he did. He is talking to us, are we listening?

Tomorrow, on Good Friday, we will hear the last words Jesus addresses to humanity from the cross just before he turns to the Father and says: “It is finished.” To humanity, he says: “I thirst.” My friends, he wasn't talking about a drink of water; he was talking about his thirst for souls. Jesus lives today. We are about to receive his Body and Blood in the Eucharist we celebrate tonight. As long as we have priests, there will be this wonderful opportunity to receive him. Other Christian churches have the Bible, the Ten Commandments, and all the books of laws and regulations and customs of their respective institutions. People find the love of Christ in these various churches. They seem fine. But the ultimate spiritual connection for us Catholics is in this Holy Eucharist. St. Paul wrote about it in tonight's second reading; this isn't something that's only a few hundred years of tradition; this goes back to the Last Supper and continued through the entire history. I read a lot about what people are seeking. It seems people are less interested in religion than they are in spirituality, that is, an actual experience of God alive in their lives. Of course religion is necessary, the

Bible and the Catechism and all those rules and regulations are helpful; but my faith life, my spiritual life, is centered on the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ that we receive at Mass and I can pray anywhere, anytime, but no where and no time as close as when I am in the Divine presence by the tabernacle.

In your kindness I am going to ask everyone to allow me to share some thoughts about priesthood. It's for everyone, but especially the men. It is traditional for Catholics to celebrate the priesthood on Holy Thursday. Because we have been confused by events, we haven't celebrated much in the past few years. So now the whole thing stands clear before my eyes. When Jesus says from the cross, "I thirst," he is calling me—unworthy and sinful as I am. Might he be calling you to give your all for souls? Do you think it is crazy to enter this war for souls as a priest? Do you think it is crazy that Jesus might want you on the front line fighting to quench his thirst? I learned through my friend Fr. Ron that when the Marines or Navy Seals are in the midst of a battle they are prepared to do anything to protect their brothers who they grow to love. But the man they are most grateful to see doesn't carry a weapon and they don't usually remember his name. They call him "padre" or "father," and they are so glad to see him when the weapons are blasting because he can forgive their sins and give them the Body of their Savior so that no matter what happens to *their* bodies, they will have Jesus on board. ...Are you more concerned that someone else might think you are crazy for deciding to take a stand as a priest? Peter tried to stop Jesus and even Mary tried to get him to give it up and come home. Considering how he suffered, who could blame them? Frankly, priesthood will bring you suffering; at times your heart will want to break; at times your spirit will want to rebel; at times the Church, your fellow priests, your friends might let you down or even sabotage you. Self regulation is the toughest regulation of all. But the work, *ah the work*, to fight the devil and deprive him of the thousand little souls he is destroying everyday can lift a man's spirit to heights he could never imagine. Jesus asks, "Do you know what I did for you?" That is good news!

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