

## **HOLY THURSDAY HOMILY 2020**

*Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-15*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: April 9, 2020

Tonight is not a typical celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Catholics in Mustang, throughout Oklahoma, across the United States and the world are not able to partake in the Holy Eucharist. On the very night when we celebrate the institution by Jesus of the Eucharist, Catholics whose faith is strengthened and sustained by such a great gift are not able to receive it.

But since this evening's celebration is unlike any other Holy Thursday celebration in our lifetime, perhaps we can broaden our understanding of this rich mystery of the Eucharist.

John the evangelist invites us to a more complete understanding of what the Lord Jesus is asking us to do to remember him.

Every year at this celebration the Church in her wisdom gifts us with this account from the Gospel of John.

However, what is missing is what we normally think of when we think of the Eucharist—the Sacred Meal.

Rather, John takes a different approach to lead us into a deeper understanding of the Eucharist.

What disciples are to do in memory of Jesus is to wash feet.

In other words, disciples are to remember Jesus' life-giving gift of himself on the cross by giving their lives away in loving service of others.

By doing so, we are nourished by the presence of the Lord in those we serve, and we become his life-giving presence for them to feast on as we give ourselves away in love for them.

Christ Jesus, the Servant of Humankind, the One who comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life away as a ransom for many, teaches us that whenever we do the same in memory of Him, he feeds us, he nourishes us.

So, as our bodies are broken open in generous love of others, as our blood is poured out in our service of others, we are filled with new life--His life.

In his Palm Sunday homily, Pope Francis noted that the coronavirus tragedy helps us *“to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others.”* The Pope challenges us to *“reach out to those suffering and in need”* and states: *“May we not be concerned with what we lack, but what good we can do for others.”*

The Pope points out that the real heroes today are not *“famous, rich and successful people”* but rather *“medical staff, nursing home caregivers, transport workers, supermarket clerks and others for their sacrifice to help lives.”* Yes, the real heroes are not sport stars or movie stars or music stars but ordinary folks who are serving others in simple yet extraordinary ways.

Some medical staff are living apart from their families at the very time they need that support the most in order to protect their loved ones from the virus. EMT’s who face unpredictable situations, phlebotomists who draw blood for testing, and those who run the tests--all giving of themselves to others.

Then there are those public servants who patrol our streets to keep us safe and others who are ready at a moment’s notice to extinguish a fire or to rush into an emergency situation.

The Body of Christ serving the Body of Christ.

There are those who stock the shelves at grocery stores and those who serve in the checkout line.

There are those whose jobs are essential but who go unseen, far from the public eye: cleaning ladies who by the very nature of their job risk coming into contact with the coronavirus;

and electrical workers who keep power flowing for our many devices, those who oversee our water plants so we can have clean water at a moment’s notice; and those long-haul truckers who drive cross country to deliver much needed goods

The Body of Christ serving the Body of Christ.

All of these and many others teach us that our lives find meaning when we serve others. All of these and many others show us that if we really want to feel connected to others then we need to share our gifts in service of their needs.

Thus, the Eucharist is more verb than noun, more an action than an object: the action of receiving Christ and then giving our lives away in love with Jesus Christ to Him living in others.

A living and true relationship with Jesus takes us beyond a “me and Jesus” spiritual world to a concrete relationship with Him in his suffering body all around us.

We cannot adore Him worthily in the Blessed Sacrament if we do not see Him and serve Him in others, especially those suffering in any way.

We hear the Lord Jesus crying out from the cross as we hear Him crying out in the least of our sisters and brothers who are suffering and feel all alone.

One spiritual author speaks about this central truth of the Eucharist and of our Eucharistic faith, as revealed by Jesus’ action in John’s Last Supper account.

*Here, Jesus is taking the place of a person at the bottom, the last place, the place of a slave.*

*For Peter this is impossible.*

*Little does he realize that Jesus came to transform the model of society, from a pyramid to a body,*

*where each and every person has a place,*

*whatever their abilities or disabilities,*

*where each one is dependent upon the other.*

*Each is called to fulfill a mission in the body of humanity and of the Church.*

*There is no “last place.”*

*Jesus, revealing himself as the least one in society, the one who does the dirty jobs, the one who is the last place, calls his followers to be attentive to the least in society.*

*God is not out of reach, in the skies.*

*God is hidden in the “heavens” of the hearts of all those who are in the last place.*

The Eucharist is not something we receive but someone we receive.

At every celebration of the Eucharist we become what we receive—the Body of Christ.

At the Eucharist, we do not come to take something but to become Someone—to become other Christ’s in this world by allowing his life to take root and grow in us.

The Eucharist is not a thing but a person,

the very person of the Crucified One now Risen, who shares his life with us, so that we might share his life and love with others.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*