

FIRST READING

Ex 12:1-8. 11-14

A reading from the book of Exodus

The law for the passover meal.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month is to be the first of all the others for you, the first month of your year. Speak to the whole community of Israel and say, "On the tenth day of this month each man must take an animal from the flock, one for each family: one animal for each household. If the household is too small to eat the animal, a man must join with his neighbour, the nearest to his house, as the number of persons requires. You must take into account what each can eat in deciding the number for the animal. It must be an animal without blemish, a male one year old; you may take it from either sheep or goats. You must keep it till the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the community of Israel shall slaughter it between the two evenings. Some of the blood must then be taken and put on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where it is eaten. That night, the flesh is to be eaten, roasted over the fire; it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. You shall eat it like this: with a girdle round your waist, sandals on your feet, a staff in your hand. You shall eat it hastily; it is a passover in honour of the Lord. That night, I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, man and beast alike, and I shall deal out punishment to all the gods of Egypt, I am the Lord. The blood shall serve to mark the houses that you live in. When I see the blood I will pass over you and you shall escape the destroying plague when I strike the land of Egypt. This day is to be a day of remembrance for you, and you must celebrate it as a feast in the Lord's honour. For all generations you are to declare it a day of festival, for ever."'

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 115:12-13. 15-18. R. cf. 1 Cor 10:16

(R.) Our blessing-cup is a communion with the blood of Christ.

1. How can I repay the Lord
for his goodness to me?
The cup of salvation I will raise;
I will call on the Lord's name. (R.)

2. O precious in the eyes of the Lord
is the death of his faithful.
Your servant, Lord, my servant am I;
you have loosened my bonds. (R.)

3. A thanksgiving sacrifice I make:
I will call on the Lord's name.
My vows to the Lord I will fulfil
before all his people. (R.)



SECOND READING

1 Cor 11:23-26

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

Until the Lord comes, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim his death.

This is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.' In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death.

The Word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jn 13:34

Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!
I give you a new commandment:
love one another as I have loved you.
Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

GOSPEL

Jn 13:1-15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

To the end he showed his love for them.

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was.

They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.' 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter, 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are.'

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

HOMILY

by **Richard Leonard**

Two of the most powerful Catholic women in the twentieth century saw the connection between service and hospitality, between the washing of feet and the feeding of the poor.

As a young Loreto nun teaching at a private girls' school in Calcutta, Mother Teresa came to see that her real vocation lay with caring for those who were dying from malnutrition in the streets. She never wanted to found large-scale big-time hospitals. To this day her congregation's homes are clinically basic and more interested in befriending the poor, than in restoring everyone to full health. Mother Teresa often argued that loneliness was the world's greatest and worst disease.

Dorothy Day once helped a nun take a homeless man to a soup kitchen in lower Manhattan. She felt drawn to return there and work. In time the experiences at the soup kitchen led her to become a Catholic and found the Catholic Worker movement with Peter Maurin. Throughout the world Catholic Workers continue to feed the poor and advocate for a more just society.

These two saintly women met in Calcutta on Holy Thursday in 1955. Dorothy Day recalls, "...when I visited Calcutta I saw an unknown woman, vigorous and purposeful, feeding and caring for skeletonised human beings carried in from the streets by city ambulances. She fed them slowly and carefully and would talk consolingly to them in Bengali, Hindi or English. As I stood behind her some of them held out imploring hands to me, seeking, I supposed, some consolation. I turned away in revulsion. I could see helping such a person in an emergency situation, but to do it every day? So I asked the nun, whom they called Mother Teresa, and she told me, "...each one is Jesus in a distressing disguise". We became life-long friends that day.'

Holy Thursday calls each of us to see the connection between service and hospitality. If the Eucharist has any impact on our lives then at least it should leave us conscious of the injustices in the world and should give us a desire to want to get down and get dirty in fixing up the problems.

There are often two blocks that stop us from doing this. The first block is that when we get down to work on the world's problems we believe that our efforts won't make much of a difference. It shouldn't come as a surprise to discover that Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day both had great devotion to Saint Therese of Lisieux's 'little way', where everything is valued and no contribution, prayer or thought is considered unimportant. Something is always better than nothing. The second block in our path is the belief that we are too powerful to get dirty. Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day had plenty to say about how personal power corrupts the human heart. Both thought that it was impossible to be a true follower of Jesus and have no practical contact with 'Jesus in a distressing disguise'.

And the reason we bother with this Christian social work is not that it makes us feel good. It's because it's what Jesus did for us. He saw us in our poverty and welcomed us to his banquet. He got down and got dirty washing our feet and told us that if we want to follow him then this is how we should spend our lives.

And to help us do it he left us the Eucharist, the meal for saints and sinners, where we gain the strength to get down and get dirty with Christ as we help him make the world ridiculously hospitable and radically just. 'On this Holy Thursday may Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa, who understood what today's feast is all about, pray for us that we may be found worthy of the example of Jesus the Lord. Amen.'

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PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Introduction: Brothers and sisters, we are called to a life of service. Let us bring before God those who are in need.

1. That the celebration of the Eucharist will be the centre of all the Church's activity on earth. Lord hear our Prayer:
2. That leaders and governments will be strengthened in their resolve to serve with justice and integrity. Lord hear our Prayer:
3. That families who live in poverty will be aided by those who live in comfort. Lord hear our Prayer:
4. That those who are absent from the table of the Lord will be sought out with hospitality and care. Lord hear our Prayer:
5. That the victorious Christ will lead this community through death to new life in these three holy days. Lord hear our Prayer:
6. That those who have died will share in Christ's victory over death. Lord hear our Prayer:

Conclusion: God of love, your Son ate and drank with sinners and washed the feet of his disciples. Hear our prayers and help us to follow Christ's example by serving others. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Reflection by **Dianne Bergant CSA**

At the beginning of our meditation of the Passover, we see God passing over us as a protective angel, preserving us from harm, leading us out of bondage into freedom. Jesus then passes beyond being Lord and master and kneels before us as our humble servant. If we are to belong to him, we must allow him to wash our feet. In both of these instances, the saving action is God's. The initiative is God's; the magnanimity is God's; the self-emptying is God's. We have nothing to contribute to these amazing happenings. All we have to do is accept the salvation that is offered. On this day of Eucharist, our only response is a sacrifice of thanksgiving, a sacrifice that is really our openness to receive the sacrifice of God – the sacrifice of the lamb and the sacrifice of Jesus' self-emptying service.

Who could have imagined that any of this would happen? A motley group of runaway labourers escapes from the clutches of their superpower overlords; bread and wine is changed into the body and blood of a man who is being hunted down; the Son who was sent by God into the world washes the feet of his disciples. It is no wonder that Peter initially resisted. God's love for us is beyond comprehension. This night we are left with the directive: 'As I have done, so you must do.' Our thanksgiving is expressed in our own self-emptying service of others. Having received the gifts of God, we give them away; they flow from God through us to others.

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