

Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper: Consume and Be Consumed

Let's begin tonight considering covenants, those solemn pacts between God and Man we come upon so often in the Sacred Scriptures. A covenant was made with Noah. God told Noah that he would never give up on his people. This was the covenant of the rainbow. There was a covenant with Abraham. God told Abraham that Abraham's conquest of faith over doubts would result in his descendants being as numerous as the stars of the sky and the grains of sand of the shore. This was the covenant of faith. There was the covenant with Moses. God told Moses that he loved his people so much he would show them how to follow him and be holy. This was the covenant of the Ten Commandments. God told the prophet Jeremiah that a time would come when there would be a New Covenant, a covenant which would be written in the hearts of the people.

And Jesus took the cup, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!"

The essence of the Eucharist is union with the sacrifice of Jesus. The Second Vatican Council put this beautifully and poetically:

At the Last Supper our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and blood to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross. He entrusted to the Church a memorial of His death and resurrection,a sacrament of love,a sign of unity,a bond of charity,a paschal banquet in whichChrist is consumed,the mind is filled with grace,and the pledge of future glory is given to us. (Sacrosanctum Concilium—the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, 47)

There are some who treat the Eucharist as merely a symbol of the community. The Eucharist is infinitely more than a meal of fellowship. On the other hand, there are some who treat the Eucharist only as a time of intense meditation. Receiving the Eucharist is more than the union of an individual with the Lord. The Eucharist is the living memorial of Calvary. The Gift of the Last Supper is the sacramental expression of the crucifixion of the Lord. This is the New Covenant in his Blood written within the hearts of Jesus' disciples.

The ability to take bread and wine and transform the reality of this existence into the Body and Blood of the Lord was given by the Lord to his disciples. "Do this in memory of me." They were given the power to act in the person of the Lord, or, using the theological expression, *in persona Christi*. This power continues in the Church through the grace of God and the mystery of the sacrament of orders. Priests take on the person of Jesus. The Liturgy of Holy Thursday, therefore, focuses on these two sacraments, the Eucharist and Holy Orders, uniting them both to the sacrifice of the

Cross. Through the grace of Holy Orders, the people are provided with the New Covenant of the Body and Blood of Lord.

This is all dogmatic theology, the theology of what we believe. It is useless without its practical application to real life. We who consume the Lord must be consumed by the Lord. The Eucharist is only fully realized in our lives when we live as a Eucharistic People. We cannot be satisfied with consuming the Lord. We must be consumed by the Lord. His life must become our lives. We must be Christians in the fullest meaning of the word, people who are so consumed by the reality of the Lord that we have been transformed. We consume the Eucharist so we can be consumed by Jesus Christ.

Before the meal, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and then said to them, "What you have seen me do for you so you must also do for others." The Lord's action was prophetic and symbolic. It was prophetic in that it suggested the extent of what the Lord would do in emptying himself for his people. Not even a slave in the time of the Lord could be required to wash the feet of a visitor. This was too demeaning. Yet Jesus does this as a prophetic expression of how much he would humble himself for the sake of his people. The washing of the feet is a prophetic action that points to the Lord's humbling himself on the Cross.

Along with being prophetic, the washing of feet is symbolic. When Jesus says, "What you have seen me do, do also yourselves," he is encouraging us to find ways to reach out to others no matter how much sacrifice or how personally demeaning this might be. You parents with infants do this every time you change a diaper. You don't complain because this is your baby, your love. No action is too demeaning to care for your treasure, your child. We Christians are called to extend this love to all. No action is too demanding for a Christian when this action is an expression of the love of Christ for others. The nurse's aid that empties bedpans, the neighbor who washes the sores of the elderly man next door, the teacher who makes time for those students who are not getting any help at home, are all performing actions that express the reality of the Eucharist.

We consume the Eucharist so we can be consumed by Jesus Christ. He is our Everything. Uniting our lives to his life give our lives meaning and purpose and fulfillment. It doesn't end here though. There is infinitely more to life than the here and now. Being consumed by Christ unites us to the Eternal; for the One Who Always Was brings those He has consumed before the Throne of the One Who Always Is, the Ancient of Days, the Glory of the Father, the Fire of the Spirit.

Let us pray: *Lord, we consume you whenever we receive communion. Give us the courage to allow you to consume us. May we allow our Eucharistic union with you to permeate every aspect of our lives so that we might truly be a Eucharistic People.*