

Holy Thursday
March 29, 2018

In the Book of Exodus, the first Passover anticipated the people of Israel leaving the slavery of Egypt and entering into freedom. The first Passover meal included: the slaughter of a one year old male lamb without blemish. Blood was also placed on the door post and lintel to protect the people from death during the Passover of the Lord. In the Book of Numbers we find the institution of the Levitical Priesthood that became responsible for offering the sacrifice of the lambs. The drinking of four cups of wine in the Passover Meal symbolized sanctification, deliverance, redemption, and praise of God's actions in the lives of the people of Israel as they journeyed from slavery to freedom. All of this and more makes up the Old Law.

From First Corinthians St. Paul tells us, **“I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.”** Handing on means a tradition has been established. Paul said, **“That the Lord Jesus on the night He was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way also the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.””** We know this to be the Holy Eucharist that has been handed down to us throughout the ages.

The celebration of the Mass finds its beginning when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with the Apostles. This occurred in the context of the Passover Meal, and was the fulfillment of the Old Law. Two noticeable differences are: there was not a Levitical priest to offer the sacrifice. Jesus Himself is the priest, and there was not a male lamb without blemish. Jesus Himself is the male lamb without blemish. He offered and became the sacrifice. The Apostles themselves became the new priesthood. Jesus use of the bread and wine to become His Body and Blood gives us what St. Thomas Aquinas calls: The New Law. A careful study of the 4 Gospels together shows that the Passover which Jesus celebrated to institute the Holy Eucharist included: the drinking of only three cups of wine. However, in John's Gospel when Jesus on the Cross cries out "**I thirst,**" and wine is raised to His lips on a sprig of hyssop and drinks, He says, "**It is finished.**" This is the fourth cup and now the Old Law has been fulfilled in the New Law. The Passover anticipated the Sacrifice of Christ that we continue to make present at Mass down to this day through the ministry of priests.

The ministry of priests is to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and be servants of the Servant. **Jesus gave us the model.** The priests with the people of God are to be humble servants. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us the accounts of Jesus giving us the Eucharist, the Body Blood Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Gospel of John teaches us what the Eucharist impels us to do. **Serve others.**

Serving others means sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. A way to look at the washing of the feet in John's Gospel is that the Apostles were not yet fully prepared to begin their mission. They needed a purifying encounter with Jesus. We too need a purifying encounter with Jesus. The washing of the feet symbolizes that purifying need for us and for others. Fully participating in the Eucharist purifies us and prepares us for the service of others.

The institution and handing on of the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ leads us from slavery to sin and gives us freedom in Jesus Christ. This is the New Law that gives us **eternal life.**