

Homily for Maundy Thursday 2024 Year B

Our Faith and the ceremonies and rituals of our Faith place great emphasis upon movement, change and transformation.

Thus, we speak of moving from darkness to light and from death to resurrection.

Tonight's liturgy reminds us how Christ himself utilised movement and transition to establish the Eucharist, the Mass, the heart, and summit of our Faith.

We hear how He took the solemn Jewish ritual of the Passover and transformed it into the Supreme symbol of God's love for his people.

On the night before He died Christ and His disciples were celebrating the Passover meal.

The Passover was a great symbol of change for the Jewish people, for each year as they sat down to celebrate it, they both remembered and gave thanks for the whole turning point of their history, when they moved out from slavery in Egypt, out into the freedom of the Chosen people of God.

We recall the details of how Moses instructed the Israelites to stay in their homes that night, to eat bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and lamb. Then the blood of the lamb was to be smeared over the lintel of their doors so the Angel of death might pass over them while the first born of the Egyptians would die.

The next day Moses led all who survived that night out into the epic journey to freedom, a journey in which He directed them, fed them with manna in the desert and protected them from danger, until they finally passed over from slavery to freedom, from the desolation of the desert to the plenitude of the Promised land.

God then established a special Covenant with them - the 10 Commandments, and this was sealed with a blood sacrifice.

So once a year the devout Jew would celebrate this feast of his redemption.

And this is what Christ was doing with His disciples.

But that night He transformed and elevated that solemn ritual to a new and deeper level of the reality of God's love for His people.

He Himself became both the Victim and the Sacrifice, the innocent Lamb of God, shedding of whose Blood was to save His people from the death of Sin.

Just as the Israelites were fed with manna, the bread from Heaven, in the desert wilderness, God's special gift to them - so too, Christ transformed the ritual of unleavened bread and wine into His own special gift to them, His own Body and Blood, likewise to nourish and protect His people on their own pilgrim journey.

Thus, the Old Covenant between God and His people was now superceded by the New Covenant and sealed with the Blood of Christ.

Listen carefully to those words at the Consecration in the Mass, words you are so familiar with.

"This is the Cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting Covenant, it will be shed for you and for all so that Sin may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me".

But now when we celebrate the Eucharist in obedience to Christ's command, we not only remember His saving event, but we also actually make it present once more, we make it a reality when at those words of Consecration uttered by the priest, the Bread and Wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Not signs or symbols, but Christ himself truly present to feed and nourish our souls, and as an abiding, comforting presents with us in the Blessed Sacrament.

A tremendous mystery that in the end only Faith can understand.

So, when the Jews celebrate Passover, they both remember and give thanks for God's saving presence with them in an historical event from long, long ago.

Christ changed the whole meaning of the Passover, so that whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, in obedience to His command, we not only remember and give thanks for Christ's sacrifice, 2000 years ago in an upper room and upon Calvary, we make Him present - and then also remember and give thanks for His loving presence in the Eucharist.

Eucharist is from a Greek word meaning Thanksgiving and that is what we are thanking God for, that through his goodness we not only have the bread (the fruit of the earth) and the wine (the fruit of the vine) to offer, but that they are transformed into our spiritual food and drink.

And that we who partake of His Body and Blood have the food of eternal life in our souls.

By His dying He has destroyed our death.

By His rising He has restored our life.

Lord Jesus come in glory.