

Reading 1 ex 12:1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,  
“This month shall stand at the head of your calendar;  
you shall reckon it the first month of the year.  
Tell the whole community of Israel:  
On the tenth of this month every one of your families  
must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.  
If a family is too small for a whole lamb,  
it shall join the nearest household in procuring one  
and shall share in the lamb  
in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it.  
The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish.  
You may take it from either the sheep or the goats.  
You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,  
and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present,  
it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.  
They shall take some of its blood  
and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel  
of every house in which they partake of the lamb.  
That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh  
with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

“This is how you are to eat it:  
with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand,  
you shall eat like those who are in flight.  
It is the Passover of the LORD.  
For on this same night I will go through Egypt,  
striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,  
and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!  
But the blood will mark the houses where you are.  
Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;  
thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,  
no destructive blow will come upon you.

“This day shall be a memorial feast for you,  
which all your generations shall celebrate  
with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”

Responsorial Psalm ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18

R/. (cf. 1 Cor 10:16) Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.  
How shall I make a return to the LORD  
for all the good he has done for me?  
The cup of salvation I will take up,  
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.  
R/. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD  
is the death of his faithful ones.  
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;  
you have loosed my bonds.  
R/. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.  
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.  
My vows to the LORD I will pay  
in the presence of all his people.  
R/. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

reading 2 1 cor 11:23-26

Brothers and sisters:  
I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,  
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."  
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Gospel jn 13:1-15

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come  
to pass from this world to the Father.  
He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.  
The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over.  
So, during supper,  
fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power  
and that he had come from God and was returning to God,  
he rose from supper and took off his outer garments.  
He took a towel and tied it around his waist.  
Then he poured water into a basin  
and began to wash the disciples' feet  
and dry them with the towel around his waist.  
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,  
"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"  
Jesus answered and said to him,  
"What I am doing, you do not understand now,  
but you will understand later."  
Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."  
Jesus answered him,  
"Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."  
Simon Peter said to him,  
"Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."

Jesus said to him,  
“Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed,  
for he is clean all over;  
so you are clean, but not all.”  
For he knew who would betray him;  
for this reason, he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

So when he had washed their feet  
and put his garments back on and reclined at table again,  
he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you?  
You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am.  
If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet,  
you ought to wash one another’s feet.  
I have given you a model to follow,  
so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

.....

Today we remember and celebrate,  
the last supper Jesus shared with his apostles  
during Passover.

Earlier today priests of every diocese & archdiocese in the world  
gathered in their cathedrals with their bishops  
to remember & celebrate the institution of the priesthood.

Tonight we remember and celebrate  
Jesus exemplary action of washing his disciples feet  
and the institution of the Eucharist.

We just heard in St Paul's letter  
and we will hear again in just a few moments  
Jesus' words at the end of the consecration...  
DO this in memory of me.

But we do more than remember.

This week our Jewish brothers and sisters  
are celebrating Passover of their year 5775.

At the seder meal Jewish people relive,  
put themselves in that very moment  
of their liberation from Egypt.

They reflect upon the meaning of that event for them now, today,  
how they are to live as a liberated people, a chosen people.

For 1,944 years during this celebration they prayed  
"Next year in Jerusalem." And next year finally came.

Our time has already come.

Tonight's celebration of the Eucharist  
must be more than a remembering of Jesus.

It is in fact our welcoming Jesus under our own roof,  
as we pray just before receiving him in communion.

We are not welcoming a memorial or a memory, but a person.  
It is an awesome gift that Jesus gives us, of himself.

But then what ?

How do we live now, today, as gifted people,  
as liberated people, as saved people ?

“How” is what Jesus teaches us by the washing of feet.

Foot washing was something done for guests by servants or slaves.

But Jesus, the host, the master, God from God  
washed the feet of his apostles.

The apostles feet were not nicely shielded with socks;  
they were not protected and covered by closed shoes.

Their feet would have been in something like sandals,  
which they would have removed  
before entering the house they were in,  
which surely did not have wall to wall carpeting.

They had just come in from the countryside.

Their feet were dirty, with dust and mud  
and dung from animals on the road.

When Jesus washed their feet,  
He got his hands dirty doing them this service.

It's clear from the Gospel, they were taken aback, shocked even.

Peter, as usual, is the outspoken one who protests.

And as usual, he is put in his place;

Jesus tells him “Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.”

And as usual Peter makes the most of his place.

“Then don't just wash my feet, wash all of me.”

This is not an act Jesus is putting on, however.

This is not just a personal favor for his best friends.

What Jesus is doing is a vital statement of principle.

“I have given you a model to follow,

so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Today Pope Francis celebrated Holy Thursday in a jail  
& washed the feet of prisoners, as he did his 1st year as Pope.  
Last year it was at a center for disabled and elderly people  
and he washed their feet,  
men & women, old & young, Christians & Muslims.  
This is not an act put on by Pope Francis, however.  
This is not just a personal favor.  
It is a statement of principle.  
He too has given us a model to follow.

Some years ago I attended this Holy Thursday Mass  
at an urban church in Washington DC.  
After the pastor had washed the feet of 12 parishioners,  
those 12 took over and washed the feet of more parishioners;  
then many of them washed the feet of others  
until everyone had their feet washed.  
It was an impressive following the example of Jesus  
and reliving his ministry of service.

We live today as gifted people, as liberated people, as saved people,  
as people who are heirs of the Son of God  
by getting our hands dirty,  
by following the model of Jesus & His other close followers  
who modeled themselves after him.  
And there is a very diverse group of those followers,  
the saints the church recognizes  
and the saints that perhaps only you or I recognize.

Saint Benedict and Saint Anselm got their hands dirty.  
So did Saint Louis, who was a very different kind of king  
than Louis XIV.  
So did St Vincent De Paul and Rose Phillipine Duchesne,

who got their hand dirty in a big way.  
and so did Saint John Paul II,  
who ten years ago today came into his inheritance  
in the kingdom of heaven.

All the saints dealt with the dirt at hand,  
the dirt that was on the roads they walked,  
the dirt that was touching the people of their place and time.

In his words to us on Palm Sunday,  
Pope Francis spoke about this coming to grips with dirt.  
He pointed out:  
God's way is the way of humility,  
a way which constantly amazes and disturbs us.  
We will never get used to a humble God!

It, however, is the way of Jesus;  
and there is no other way to follow him.  
The way of the world, worldliness, is opposed to the way of Christ.  
The world's way is one of vanity, pride, success, power.  
But Pope Francis tells us,  
there can be no humility without humiliation.

Well, it is easy enough for us to accept the virtue of humility,  
but we instinctively rebel against humiliation.

Humiliation will come our way quite naturally from the world  
when we follow Christ's way, God's way.  
There will always be those ready and willing to humiliate,  
to throw dirt and dung upon  
Christ's Church and its members.  
It's on the news every day.

But our genuine humility is to be demonstrated

by our solidarity with,  
by standing shoulder to shoulder with the suffering.  
Who around us is suffering,  
and what can we, what can I do about it...  
Today we cannot help but think of those 150 terrified passengers  
deliberately crashed into the hard rocks of the Alps,  
and the immense suffering their families now endure.

Month by month, year by year,  
time presents us with senseless, hateful and grim tragedies  
overflowing with human suffering that make the headlines.  
And unless it happens here,  
we cannot do much about those other than pray.

But the suffering that quietly goes on in our own city, all around us  
- the homeless, the hungry, the unemployed,  
the victims of violence and prejudice,  
the fatally ill, the misunderstood mentally ill,  
the lonely, the elderly warehoused in institutions,  
drug addicts trapped in hopelessness,  
there is plenty of suffering close at hand  
that we can do something about some of it,  
for some people, nailed to their crosses.  
Others, struggling to carry their crosses, need our help.  
The suffering we will always have with us.

Memory is a passing, changeable thing.  
But the Church has kept alive & exact this supper with the Lord,  
has kept alive and exact his sacrifice on the cross.  
The Eucharist cannot be just a history lesson,  
a past event we remember in reverence  
like the sacrifice of those on December 8 1941 or 9/11/01.

It is in fact a present moment  
when Christ gives himself for us & to us again;  
enabling us to be Christ for others.

We come forward at Communion  
to receive the nourishment Jesus left us  
so that we will not only be washed clean  
but also transformed into the One whose life we receive  
in this Passover Eucharistic banquet –  
a life of service and self giving.

This day and each time we celebrate Eucharist,  
is our time to remember who we were, and who we are now  
because of what God has done for us,  
because of that Passover sacrifice he became for us in Jesus.

People sometimes refer to us as "practicing Catholics  
if we attend Mass regularly .

But it needs to be more than that.

We need to "practice"  
the way musicians practice a piece over and over again  
until they get it right.

We can't stop if we hit a wrong note or skip a line.

We need to continue practicing what Jesus teaches us today  
and not get discouraged when we fail, like Peter,  
to perfectly reflect  
the kind of discipleship Jesus has modeled for us.

We will fail at times because we are only human,  
but we keep practicing  
and the Eucharist we receive helps us keep at our attempts  
to do what Jesus has told us to do,

"I have given you a model to follow,  
so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

The model and the principle Jesus gives us,  
the model and the principle Pope Francis reminds us of,  
The Eucharist is,  
Love...true love, genuine love  
because God is love.

The beloved disciple who stayed at the foot of the cross  
assures us it is so.

The Eucharist, the foot washing,  
should give us courage and confidence to get our hands dirty,  
to be the loving saints we are each called to be,  
gifted, liberated and saved,  
today.

We do remember accurately the past,  
but we live today,  
and build the future that God, that love, plans.

Let each of us pray, in the words Pope Francis did today,  
that during this Mass, the Lord washes my dirt also,  
so that I become more slave-like  
in the service of people as Jesus did.