

HOMILY FOR HOLY THURSDAY- APRIL 1, 2021

READINGS: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14;

Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 116; 1

Corinthians 11:23-26;

Gospel of John 13:1-15

The Eucharist inspiring our desire to serve

A couple of weeks ago, the Catholic Register carried a special feature with the title “Heeding the call to service”. In this special feature, there were some inspiring stories of men and women who have answered the call to serve. Maribel Maryoga felt a call to use her talent in dancing in a different way-- to work in Faith communication in the digital world. Twenty-one year-old Hope Agbolosoo from Milton, Ontario used his talent in sports to launch Project Hope. He has been raising funds to provide sport facilities for children in Ghana. Markus de Domenico, a Toronto Catholic School Board trustee and a father of two hearing impaired children leads a campaign for equity and accessibility and inclusion of hearing impaired students in schools and other places. One of de Domenico’s recent motions about his campaign was passed in 2020. The motion allows for board meetings to be close-captioned and have a sign language interpreter available. There were stories of some seminarians receiving their formation to become priests and also stories of some women preparing to take their vows to become nuns. Each call in the stories is different but the response to the call is the same-- to serve God’s people.

This evening, our Lenten journey brings us to a period referred to as the Easter Triduum or the Paschal Triduum when we celebrate the suffering, Death and Resurrection of our Lord. We come together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper that begins the Triduum that also includes Good Friday and the Holy Saturday. At the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, we celebrate Jesus’ gift of the Eucharist to the Church. Today’s readings invite us to reflect on the significance of the celebration of the Eucharist to our call to serve.

We begin with the first reading from the Book of Exodus. The passage describes the celebration of the Passover meal. The meal was prepared from a lamb “without blemish”. God instructed the Israelites in Egypt to put the blood of the lamb on the top of the doorframes of their homes. The blood would be a sign to the angel of death to pass over the homes of the Israelites during the last plague that killed the firstborn children in Egypt. The blood of the lamb saved the lives of the children of the Israelites. The celebration of the Passover meal became a tradition for the Israelites.

The celebration of the Passover meal in the first reading forms the backdrop to the Gospel reading from John. Today’s passage is related to the celebration of the Passover festival. The celebration of the Passover meal is reported in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew (26: 26-28), Mark (14: 22-24) and Luke (22: 19-20) during which Jesus is described as instituting the Holy Eucharist of bread and wine.

In today's Gospel passage, there is no mention of the event that is reported in the Synoptic Gospels about the institution of the Eucharist. However, a distinctive event, unique in John's Gospel took place at the supper Jesus had with his disciples. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The washing of feet was a job reserved for slaves at the time of Jesus and it was considered a job of very low standard. In his role as a slave, Jesus demonstrated the reversal of role in the sense that he became a slave for his disciples. Assuming the role of a slave, the Evangelist portrays Jesus as a servant. To have your feet washed at the house of a host also symbolized the love of the host for his friends. We hear from the passage that Jesus washed the feet to set an example by telling the disciples, "you also should do as I have done to you." The Evangelist uses the washing of the feet to explain his theology of the mission of Jesus, the Son of God. The Evangelist has placed the washing of the feet at the celebration of the Passover meal to connect the ritual meal with the love that Jesus has for his disciples.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we celebrate today's Mass to remember the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus. We also remember that there was no Eucharist before the Last Supper. You might have noticed that the tabernacle is opened symbolizing that there are no hosts from a previous celebration of Mass. The institution of the Eucharist is what Paul describes in the second reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians. The word "remembrance" used in this second reading means much more than to simply recall what happened in the past. It means that recounting a previous event makes that ancient reality present, alive and active here and now. According to Paul, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

As we remember the day that Jesus instituted the Eucharist, we are also called to be mindful that the celebration of the Eucharist and the washing of the feet go together. Traditionally, the celebrant will perform the washing of the feet of some parishioners after the homily. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic with its restrictions, the washing of the feet is omitted this year.

How do we follow in Jesus' footsteps as people who believe in him? Over the past five weeks the Church has given us a time to reflect on how we live as people called to serve others. How are we serving God's people? The stories in the special feature in the Catholic Register that I shared with you earlier tell us that we can serve in our own situations from the gifts that God has given us. We can serve in different ways. One thing that came out of the special feature was that each of the people is contributing to the building up of their communities. They all agree that serving others brings them a sense of purpose in life and joy. When we strive to offer ourselves through our acts of love and charity, we help create unity between the people of God. As servants of the Eucharist, let us ask God to inspire us to service that brings joy, hope and love to others.

Fr. Yaw Acheampong