

Rev. Derek Fairman

Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper

This night begins the Sacred Triduum. These are the most solemn three days in the entire year. Tonight, we begin with the Mass of the Lord's Supper. We begin by celebrating the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. As we come to celebrate the Eucharist, we enter more deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist and the Lord's Passion.

In the first reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear about the preparations made for the Passover. Now, it is important to keep in mind that the Lord gave Moses these instructions *before* the Lord passed over the Israelites. In fact, it was the blood from the Passover lambs that the Israelites would apply on the posts and lintels of their homes. Seeing the blood, the Lord would pass over those homes and would protect those inside.

So, the Israelites had to put their faith in the Lord, that He would in fact visit the last plague upon the Egyptians but pass over them. They had already seen the first nine plagues in which the Lord distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians. We might wonder what the Israelites might have thought, whether they believed that the Lord would execute one last plague upon Egypt.

What is clear, though, is that they had to prepare the Passover meal to commemorate the Lord passing over them *before* the Lord actually did so. Not only that, but it was this very commemoration that brought about the Passover. The first Passover meal not only commemorated something that had not happened yet, but it was an important part of distinguishing the homes of the Israelites, so that the Lord passed over those homes.

This is important for several reasons. One of those reasons is that the Lord gave the command to the Israelites. The Israelites did not make the ritual up by themselves years later. Even though most of the time, people commemorate something only afterwards, the Passover meal was no mere human invention. Rather, the Lord, who can foresee all things, established the Passover meal, knowing that He would strike down the Egyptians but spare the Israelites.

Another reason is that the Lord was bringing forth the faith of the Israelite people. They needed to respond to the Lord's command in order to undergo the Passover. Only those who had participated in the Passover meal would be passed over when death came, because only they had the blood of the Passover lamb. By anticipating what was coming, they put their trust in the

Lord. They were looking forward to their release from Egypt, but they had to trust that God would fulfill His promises.

That brings us to the great mystery which we celebrate tonight. We remember that the Lord Jesus, before He died, established the Eucharist and the Mass. We remember that the Lord Jesus established the Sacrifice of the Mass as a way of perpetually bringing His Sacrifice on the Cross to us, who live so many years later. However, we might understand the Lord's actions more deeply if we look at the similarities between the Eucharist and the Passover.

There are many similarities, but an important similarity is that the Lord Jesus established the Eucharist as a memorial of His death, *before* His death. The Apostles had heard the Lord Jesus predict His death before, but it was quite different than the immediate preparation for that death at the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, the Apostles heard the Lord Jesus explain His death and its significance. They received His words about the meaning of His death.

Perhaps the Apostles did not understand at the time, but they would understand later. They could look back on the Lord's death and understand what it meant. They would celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass, not as an afterthought, but to make present the Lord's Sacrifice. The Apostles did not invent the Mass later, nor did the Church. The Lord Jesus established the Sacrifice of the Mass. He did so *before* the Sacrifice that He made on the Cross.

He brings the Sacrifice that He made on the Cross to us in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Why? For one thing, so that we can join our own sacrifices to His own. By making His Sacrifice on the Cross truly present, He allows us to join with Him, in offering ourselves to the Father. He allows us to join with Him in His Death so that we can join in His Resurrection.

He also brings His Sacrifice to us in the Sacrifice of the Mass so that He can bring redemption and all graces to us. We can partake of all the graces that He won whenever He offered Himself. When we come to Mass, we bring all of our sacrifices, and we bring our hopes and desires, all of our needs and wants, and the Lord Jesus satisfies them. We receive all that we need from the Lord Jesus.

Tonight, as we come together, and as we approach this altar, we come to seek the Lord. He knows what we need, *before* we do. He knows what we need, even though we may not. The Lord wants us to put our trust in Him. The Lord wants our faith in Him to grow, so that like the Israelites, we can have faith that the Lord will fulfill all of His promises. The Lord invites us to draw closer to Him, like the Apostles, so that we can share in His Resurrection.