

## Holy Thursday 2013 Stepping Outside of Ourselves

Fr. Frank Schuster

How do we live holy week? My friends, how do we enter into the story of our salvation? Pope Francis said something very meaningful to me at yesterday's general audience. He said, "Living Holy Week means increasingly entering into God's logic, the logic of the Cross, which is not first of all that of pain and death, but of love and of self-giving that brings life." He invites us to consider that living Holy Week, which is the same things as to say, living the Christian life, involves stepping outside of ourselves in love of God and our neighbor.

In our first reading from Exodus, we encounter a God who steps out of himself by inserting himself into our human history by rescuing the Hebrew people during Passover from slavery to Pharaoh. In exchange, God asks the Hebrew people to keep the anniversary of Passover holy, as a memorial feast. The Jewish people celebrate this feast day with reverence every year.

In our second reading from St. Paul, we remember God stepping out of himself in the most perfect way through the incarnation, in the person of Jesus Christ while giving us the earliest record of the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, you see, we have the first celebration of Holy Eucharist. Jesus instituted the Eucharist in context of the Passover Meal. Instead of being liberated from the yoke of Pharaoh, Jesus becomes our paschal lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus steps outside of himself, giving himself to us through his sacred body and precious blood. Every time we gather for Mass, we celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of Jesus just as he asked.

Our reading from the Gospel of John demonstrates beautifully of what it means to live Holy Week. In John's version of the Last Supper, Jesus rises from the table and proceeds to wash his disciple's feet. This was a remarkable demonstration of humility because ordinary hospitality did not require the washing of guests' feet. In some households, there might have been a basin at the door for you to wash your own feet. In wealthier households, there might have been a servant present to assist with this gesture of hospitality.

When Jesus begins washing his disciples' feet, there is a moment of shock and awe. This isn't just the teacher kneeling before the student or the master serving the servant. The disciples have already identified Jesus as the Son of God. Therefore, what we have here is the Creator humbling himself before his creation and this foreshadows what is going to happen tomorrow night on the cross. All of this we keep in mind when we receive Christ's real presence in the Holy Eucharist.

How do we live Holy Week? Pope Francis suggests stepping outside of ourselves in love of God and neighbor. We need to step outside of ourselves in love of God because we can find ourselves all too often in a spiritual rut where we forget how much God tenderly loves us. We need to step outside of ourselves in love of others because when we do so we awaken that side of ourselves that is most like God.

It has been the tradition of the Vatican that the Pope celebrates Holy Thursday at St. John Lateran, Rome's Cathedral, and washes the feet of twelve senior priests of Rome. This has been a beautiful tradition inviting priests around the world to help better understand their calling as ordained ministers. We are called to serve.

This year, however, since the Pope has yet to be installed in his Cathedral parish, the Vatican had planned to hold this liturgy at St. Peter's Basilica. In fact, over a thousand tickets had been already issued for this liturgy. Pope Francis had other plans, surprise, surprise.

Pope Francis decided he wanted to visit a juvenile detention center and celebrate a private mass for the inmates there, and wash their feet. How's that for stepping outside of oneself? How's that for living Holy Week? How is that an example for you and me to follow?

On the altar here, we have a copper icon of the Last Supper. Many altars follow this tradition of incorporating an art piece of the Last Supper. If you look closely you will see that we chose St. John's Gospel account of the Last Supper because Jesus is kneeling in front washing the feet of St. Peter. We chose this image because when you think of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and her life, she was about washing the feet of others, especially the poorest of the poor.

And so we can ask ourselves tonight, how do we live Holy Week? How do we grow in love of God and others? How can we step outside of our normal routine and allow the Holy Spirit to enkindle in our hearts the fire of his love? Can we step outside of ourselves in our love for God who loved us first? Can we then step outside of ourselves in love for others, as a Eucharistic people, doing little things with great love? If we do, we will not only live Holy Week. We will enter into a spring time of the spirit life.