

Holy Thursday “The Holy Triduum and the Remedy for Weariness”

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My friends, the one line from scripture that stood out to me the most as we entered into Holy Week last Sunday was from the prophet Isaiah, “The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.” I found it interesting that passage from Isaiah was also proclaimed at yesterday’s mass...the last mass for the season of Lent before we begin the holy Triduum. That reading from Isaiah somehow felt like a bold challenge to homilists and preachers throughout the world in the face of great weariness, particularly due to the fire engulfing Notre Dame we saw in Paris or what we see happening in the news in other parts of the world with regard to human suffering or even the frustrations we experience in our homes and families at times. However, that reading from Isaiah also felt like an invitation that, despite all the temptations we have to despair some days, to defiantly choose to welcome God’s grace into our hearts instead. You see, the celebration of the Triduum, the holy three days which we have begun tonight, is meant to rouse something within us. It is meant to shake us out of our ordinary lives, to give us perspective and hope. The Triduum challenges us to become part of the sacred story of our salvation these next few days. If we do, I believe we just might find that remedy for weariness Isaiah talks about. We might be surprised by grace.

And the readings tonight are audacious in that they suggest everything that the Chosen People went through from the first Passover of the Exodus thousands of years ago and all the trials, tribulations and tragedies we have experienced in the centuries that followed, have led us to this very night. Just as Moses was told to sacrifice a lamb for the salvation of his people; tonight Jesus is our Passover lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Moses was also told to provide unleavened bread for the Passover meal. On the very night before Jesus died, simple Passover gifts of bread and wine become Jesus’ Body and Blood for our salvation and the salvation of the world. The priesthood itself is born tonight by Jesus’ command to “do this in remembrance of me”, as faithfully recounted by St. Paul in our second reading.

However, it is the story of the Last Supper in the Gospel of Saint John that is the most striking of all. Recall how the Gospel of Saint John began, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ...and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” Tonight, the Gospel of Saint John shows us what the glory of God looks like. The Gospel says, “Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father...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.”

This is an earth shattering moment in Sacred Scripture because what it means is this: all the ways God intervened for the Chosen People throughout the centuries, covenant after covenant, all of it, has led to God himself kneeling in the dust tonight before us instead of us kneeling before him. Think about that. God kneels before us tonight, to serve us, to wash our feet. My friends, we are meant to understand the Eucharist in this way. We are meant to understand the crucifixion in this way. We are meant to understand the resurrection in this way. We are therefore meant to understand our discipleship in this way. You see, if we find ourselves feeling weary with our lives right now for whatever reason, the remedy for weariness it seems is to become one with Jesus in the Eucharist and to reflect that oneness with the Lord by kneeling before others and washing their feet. That is the secret. Our patroness, Mother Teresa, knew about that. The lives of the saints all demonstrate that. Tonight Jesus gives us an example to follow, as he profoundly leads us from table of his Last Supper to the altar of his cross.