

Holy Thursday
April 21, 2011
Fr. Tom Elliott

Commemorating the Paschal Mystery

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
Psalm 116
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-15

We commemorate or memorialize almost all significant events in life. We remember anniversaries and birthdays. We celebrate commemorations such as Independence Day and Memorial Day. Our celebration today, Holy Thursday, is a religious commemoration. It memorializes the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. And, the Eucharist itself is the commemoration of the Paschal Mystery.

The phrase, “Paschal Mystery” describes the unified event of Christ’s Passion, death, and Resurrection. As Christians, we believe that the Eucharist is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Today, Holy Thursday, we commemorate and celebrate Jesus giving us the Eucharist.

Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, explains how the Eucharist is the commemoration of the Paschal Mystery, writing—

For 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.

--1 Corinthians 11:23-26

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes it very clear that we are to celebrate the Eucharist as a commemoration of his passion, death, and Resurrection. He says—“This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me,” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (Luke 22:19b-20)

The reason why we celebrate the Eucharist so frequently is because it commemorates the Paschal Mystery. It reminds us that Jesus saved us. It reminds us that we were completely lost in sin, on the path toward hell, when Jesus rescued us and gave us new life. When we could not rescue ourselves, Jesus saved us! Let us be grateful today for the passion, death, and Resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ!

In many Christian communities throughout the world, the commemoration of the Last Supper is celebrated very infrequently. The reason we celebrate it so frequently in the Catholic Church is because it is the commemoration of the most significant event in the history of the universe! It reminds us of the Paschal Mystery—that we were completely and utterly lost—damned to hell and unable to save ourselves—when God rescued us! May our celebration today fill our hearts with great gratitude for the passion, death, and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!