

HOLY THURSDAY HOMILY 02

(Freedom to Serve)

(Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15)

This celebration tonight begins the three great liturgical days of the year – what we call the Easter Triduum. Perhaps you noticed, as you listened to the readings, that there is a natural dynamic flow that connects each reading with the others.

The first reading from Exodus is all about political liberation of the chosen people by the flesh and blood of a lamb that is sacrificed and consumed as sacred food.

The second reading from St Paul to the Corinthians identifies Jesus as the new Paschal Lamb whose flesh and blood is now present in the Eucharist that he instituted at the Last Supper; the event that we celebrate this Holy Thursday. It is this Body and Blood of Christ that now liberates us spiritually from all our sin and sinfulness and that gives us new life through his Spirit.

The gospel of John pointedly substitutes the washing of feet in the place of the institution of the Eucharist in the Synoptics. The message here is clear – it is in loving, selfless, sacrificial service to others that the dynamism of the Eucharist is to be found and lived out.

To sum up, the God who liberated the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt through the Passover Lamb, now liberates us from all sin and sinfulness through the love of Christ made present in the Eucharist. That same loving God now missions us to go out and live the Eucharist through loving service of our fellow human beings and of all creation.

John Bell of the Iona Community invited a black South African woman to share her story on television in England. She was running an orphanage for children whose parents had died of HIV/AIDS. Her love and commitment to these children was total and unconditional. Her words were simple and direct. He asked her what she would like to leave behind as her legacy. She thought a moment and replied that the legacy she would like to leave behind would be to have spent everything she had, that she would meet God empty-handed because she had used up completely every gift that God had given

her. She wanted to leave nothing behind except a little footprint that might help others find their way. In that way she was like Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve.

A familiar old hymn captures in one stanza the spirit of this Holy Thursday celebration: *Called from worship into service; forth in his great name we go. To the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show.*

So as we celebrate tonight the gifts of priesthood and Eucharist given out of tremendous love by God to the Church, let us appreciate the Eucharist as a memorial meal and thanksgiving sacrifice that sets us free to serve.