

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

We look forward to Holy Week – the most sacred week of the year. On Holy Thursday, we take part in the Last Supper. There are three elements of the Last Supper. The first is that Jesus institutes the great gift of the Eucharist – the gift of His abiding Presence among us. He gives us His very Body and Blood to feed us, to nourish us, to draw us close to His Heart. His Eucharistic Presence, still among us today, is a great sign of the humility of God – that He would allow Himself to be “man-handled” (if we were so inclined) by sinners such as us. He does it so that we will not feel threatened, but will recognize His lowliness and run to Him and be embraced by His love. The Eucharist draws us to His Heart.

The second part of the Last Supper is that He gives us the sign of servant-leadership in the washing of the feet of His disciples. This act of a slave is now a call to love – to love our brothers and sisters in humble, loving service. We look at Jesus’ love here, as He prostrated Himself to wash to wash even Judas’ feet (who He knew would betray Him). Jesus “had kissed those feet with brotherly affection, as if by sheer force of love He wanted to hold him back from his impious, sacrilegious design, or at least, having committed the insane deed, he might enter into himself, recalling so many proofs of love, and perhaps repent and be saved” (*The Agony of Jesus* by St. Padre Pio, p 12). And Jesus reaches out to us in the same love, asking us to see this love so that we might not sin, or if we do, to turn back to Him and repent.

Third, by both of these acts (the Eucharist and feet washing), Jesus institutes the ministerial priesthood. At the center of the priesthood is the Eucharist and works of humble, loving service.

The Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday reflects these three elements as we read about the institution of the Eucharist (in the second reading) and the washing of the feet (in the Gospel), and see both of these reenacted – first the washing in symbol, and then the powerful gift of the consecration of the bread and wine as they become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, our God.

After the Supper, Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and is in Agony. We follow Him there, as we process to the Parish Center at the end of the Holy Thursday Liturgy. We enter the Garden with Him, and watch and pray through His Agony.

Gethsemane means “oil press” and as olives are crushed so that the oil may be used, so we see here Jesus being crushed. He begs His closest friends, Peter, James and John – those who have seen Him raise people from the dead, as well as His Transfiguration – to watch with Him, to keep Him company in His human fragility. He takes on the sin of the world! Sometimes when we truly see what one of our sins has done – hurting God, others and self – it can crush us under its weight. Jesus takes on EVERY sin. He is in agony. He is troubled and distressed. He is alone.

The Passion Narratives focus more on the loneliness of Christ than on His physical sufferings. He begs His *Abba* – His Daddy – to remove this chalice of suffering, as He collapses on the ground. But even in this moment of torment, He says, “Not what I will but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

Jesus has been agonizing with this for an hour, and He goes back to Peter, James and John. He is in need of consoling, of companions – and they have been asleep. His Heart aches to be with someone, and they have fallen asleep. He stirs them, in His anguish, calling them to pray, to be awake with Him in His agony. Truly, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).

Over three hours he prays, and they keep falling asleep. He says to watch. At the end of the third hour, the hour of His betrayal has come.

On Holy Thursday, we have the opportunity to make up for this. The Lord, in choosing to become human, is alone and in need of consolation – we can watch and pray with Him. We go to the Garden to watch with the Lord. In the Psalms, we hear, “I looked in vain for compassion, for consolers; not one could I find” (Ps 69:21). Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta exhorts us to “Be the *one*” to console Him. In some mystical way, our prayer and care for him is truly able to console Him in His Agony 2000 years ago. You are invited to come to the Parish Center any time after the Holy Thursday Mass until Midnight to pray with the Lord in the Garden, to spend that time consoling His agonized Heart.