**HOLY THURSDAY**

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

Ex 12:1-8,11-14; Ps 116; 1Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15

*Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ*

**GOOD FRIDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION**

Is 52:13-53:12; Ps 31; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; Jn 18:1-19:42

*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*

**HOLY SATURDAY AT THE EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT OF EASTER**

EASTER SUNDAY THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

I: Gn 1:1-2:2; Ps 104; II: Gn 22:1-18; Ps 16; III: Ex 14:15-15:1; Ex 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18; IV: Is 54:5-14; Ps 30; V: Is 55:1-11; Is 12:2-6; VI: Bar 3:9-15,32-4:4; Ps 19; VII: Ez 36:16-17a,18-28; Ps 42; Epistle: Rom 6:3-11; Ps 118; Lk 24:1-12

**COMMENTARY**

As we enter the Easter Triduum, I would like to remind what has been underlined in the commentary for Palm Sunday: “[The liturgical celebration of the Holy Week and Triduum] is not simply a remembrance of what happened in the past, but a realization of the mystery of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection for us in the present. We are called to relive these events, to participate in them, moreover, to die to ourselves for a new life in Christ and in God. It will therefore be fundamental to listen attentively and humbly to the Word of God that speaks abundantly to us (…) in the readings *as well as* in various liturgical prayers. It is also necessary to have an attitude of personal reflection and meditation on what has been heard, to enter into the depths of the mystery being celebrated.”

“The spiritual richness of Jesus’ Passion is immense for Christian life and mission. What I share with you for these special days of Holy Week is just some introductory notes, which hopefully may invite all to deeper personal reflection and meditation upon its meaning for us.” Therefore, my intention will simply be to let Jesus speak with His words and actions that should be dear to every disciple of His.

That being said, I humbly lay out a few thoughts on Jesus’ last desire, last word, and last action which particularly struck me.

*1. The Last Desire of Jesus (Holy Thursday)*

On this holy day, we enter into the mystery of the Eucharist’s institution with fresh memory of what we have heard from the reading of Jesus’ Passion on Palm Sunday. From the account of Saint Luke which was proclaimed in this liturgical year (C), a detail gives us a glimpse of Jesus’ particular sentiment at the beginning of the Last Supper. He said to his disciples: “*I have eagerly desired* to eat *this Passover*with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:15-16). Here is his last desire before His passion and death. It is expressed in a peculiar grammatical structure of redundancy in the Greek original: *epithymia epethymêsa* (lit. “I desired the desire”). Such a construction actually reflects the Hebrew/Aramaic way of speaking (that of Jesus), used to emphasize a very strong desire of the heart – *I desired fervently*.

This phrase of Jesus, in its style, echoes the statement He made during His public ministry: “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and *how great is my anguish* until it is accomplished!” (Lk 12:50). Here, too, we see Jesus’ mind and heart all geared toward His passion and death as the culmination of His mission, that “hour” when He will be baptized/immersed in blood, and drink the cup of the Father. This ardent desire of Jesus to “eat” the Passover with his disciples comes from his great zeal to faithfully fulfill the mission entrusted to Him by the Father. On the other hand, contained in this desire is all the importance of the Last Supper event, which is intrinsically linked with the moment of the Cross, because at this meal Jesus will establish once and for all the Eucharist, the rite of the New Covenant in His blood (cf. 1 Cor 11:25). It is, therefore, His great desire that His “apostles” participate in His mission and Passion.

Everything is immersed in the perspective of the realization of the Kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus solemnly declares: “[Because] I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:16) and, then, “from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Lk 22:18). These statements are mysterious in some ways, but they sound actually like a solemn oath of a consecrated person of God in making a vow to perform some sacred action (cf. Nm 6:2-4). Jesus, the anointed and consecrated one of God, will do everything, or rather, he will do the supreme act of all things, sacrificing Himself, for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Will the disciples of that time have understood or sensed such a strong feeling of their Master and His zeal? And do we, His modern disciples, today as every time we are at the Eucharist (at Mass), feel such a burning desire of Jesus to eat *this Passover* with us? He still wants, mystically but always ardently, to have *this* Passover supper with His disciples in order to share again with each of them all of Himself, body, blood, life, passion, mission. To feel this desire of Jesus will surely be fundamental for each of His disciples to continue Jesus’ own mission with the same zeal to accomplish the will of the Father despite everything. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1Cor 11: 26).

*2. The Last Word of Jesus (Good Friday) (and His Priestly Prayer)*

“It is finished.” (Jn 19:30). This is the last sentence of Jesus before he died according to the passion account in the Gospel of John that we hear every Good Friday. In the original Greek, it is a verb in the perfect, *tetelestai*, which literally means, “it has reached the end.” This word is wonderfully connected (and perhaps intentionally by the evangelist) with what was stated at the beginning of the account of the passion that we heard in the Gospel of Holy Thursday: “Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and *he loved them* *to the end*” (Jn 13:1).

The fulfillment of the whole mission of Jesus came under the sign of love. This is true both quantitatively (up to the last moment of life) and qualitatively (up to the supreme act of dying for his friends / loved ones). In Jesus on the cross, love has reached the height of its measure which is precisely love without measure (to repeat an aphorism of St. Augustine). From this perspective, we understand what Jesus himself had declared: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:32). His is the mission in love. Indeed, it is love in mission!

As the second reading of Good Friday reminds us, “[Christ, in fact,] in the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one [God] who was able to save him from death” (Heb 5:7). Of all these prayers, there is one particularly to meditate and repeat especially during the Holy Triduum. This is the so-called priestly prayer of Jesus in Jn 17 (which unfortunately is not read in the liturgy). It expresses the whole profound meaning of the passion and death of Jesus and, at the same time, reveals the whole missionary dimension of Jesus’ existence as well as the loving heart for his disciples of all times: that they may be united in love like him with the Father, so that the world may believe in him as the One sent by the Father. It will therefore be important for every missionary disciple of Jesus to put these words of the Master to heart, to learn them by heart, in order to pray with them often, particularly in these holy days.

*3. The Last Act of Jesus (Waiting for the Resurrection)*

Also in the Passion account according to St. John, after uttering the mentioned last word, “bowing his head, *he handed over the spirit*.” Here we have another theological subtlety to emphasize, even if some modern translations of the gospel do not highlight it. The phrase may simply indicate Jesus’ act of dying, exhaling His last breath (a simple “he expired”). Nevertheless, such a construction of the sentence also implies an action of giving/donating the spirit that is in Jesus. In the evangelist’s profound theological vision, Jesus’ last breath is His final action of handing over/giving/donating to the world, indeed to the universe, His own spirit for a new creation: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). As in the creation of the world, the Spirit of God swept over primordial and permeated the earth without form or shape (cf. Gen 1:1-2), so now from the height of the Cross on Calvary, the Spirit fills the universe once again, the one deformed now because of sins, to signal already the dawn of a new history, even if everything was still in darkness waiting for the Light that shines (just like at the beginning of the first creation).

*(to be continued)*