

RENEW LENT - HOLY THURSDAY

MARCH 28, 2024

Holy Thursday: An Invitation to Serve with Love

By Carol Sheldon

Holy Thursday has held a special place in our family's hearts for many years. We have quite often celebrated a Seder supper to commemorate the Jewish roots of our faith and its link to the Last Supper.

While in the Holy Land in 2023, we witnessed a family celebrating Shabbat at a restaurant. On our flight to Tel Aviv, a young, devoted Jewish man was doing his one hour of prayer; standing, bowing, and praising God quietly. Both these experiences spoke of dedication, devotion, and putting God first. Their devotion spoke of how their lived life is centered around their prayer. For many years, I often tried to fit prayer into my lived life. Through practice and the examples of others, I learned that my prayer needs to come first. First of all, to serve God, and from there, my prayer extends into my day and all I do. Now, I work hard each day to put my prayer first. I find the days I don't take this time, the day does not unfold as well as it could. Often in scripture, we see how Jesus went off and prayed. His relationship with his Father renewed him and gave him energy for his next mission. I figure if Jesus, the son of God, needed to pray, how much more do I need to pray to go out and live my life in the world?

Holy Thursday is a good time to reflect on how we are called to serve others, as Jesus showed us.

Imagine being at that meal where Jesus holds up a simple piece of bread and says, "This is my body given up for you. This is my blood poured out for you. Do this in Remembrance of me." We do this at each Eucharistic celebration.

Many years ago, I read an article about a young Mom's experience at Mass. This young Mom wrote that she was pacing at the back of the church with her baby, trying to soothe them; the Priest held up the host and said, "This is my Body given up for you." She said at that moment, she knew what that meant. She gave up her body for this little child from the moment of conception. Things changed for her. And now, at this moment and each hour of the day, she was giving up herself for this child. I found this so powerful, as I was a young Mom at the time, and I understood what she was saying. In the same way Jesus gave up his body for us, we, too, give up our bodies for others as we serve them. This is one of the main foci of Holy Thursday - **service**.



So, we have this simple meal of bread and wine, and then Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and tells them they must do the same. Each year, when this day arrives, I think of Pope Francis going to a women's prison and washing their feet. After the Last Supper, Jesus removes his outer garment (Divinity) and becomes one of us (humanity), showing us our mission in the world. We are to wash one another's feet. Fr. Ron Rolheiser puts it best when he says we are to wash each other's feet, removing any animosity we might have with one another. Liberals shall wash the feet of Conservatives, pro-life wash the feet of pro-choice, and so on. In this way, our focus is on Christ, not our opinions or choices in life. In each person we serve, we are serving Christ. Nothing else matters.

As we begin the Triduum today, let us throw ourselves into the divine fire of spiritual love. Let all that is not of God be burnt away. Let us see how Christ's face and our face are one - there is no difference. Then, when we are called to stay with another, to serve another, we do it out of love, extending Christ's love to that person. As St. Teresa of Avila said, "Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he sees compassion on the world."

In many churches, there is adoration after the Holy Thursday liturgy. It reminds us that this Mass of the Triduum has just begun. Notice there is no closing prayer, but the Mass continues throughout Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday when a final blessing is said. At the Holy Thursday liturgy, I have always been struck by how appropriate it would be to do the Taizé chant, "Remain with me, Stay here with me, Watch and Pray, Watch and Pray."

This reflection began with the importance of prayer, not just saying prayers, which is good too, but spending time with God in silence and listening. Sometimes, it's speaking openly to God, maybe like Jesus, begging to have some hard thing taken away from us but spending enough time to hear God saying - "I Love You. Together, we can do this." And then being free enough to say, "Let your will be done in me." May we stay and pray, especially during the difficult moments of our lives. God does not abandon us but suffers with us. Let us enter into these last three days, the Triduum, knowing that God, who loves us so much, invites each of us into a deeper relationship. Is it worth your time to stay and pray?

We are asked to stay and pray in the difficult moments of our lives, always and in all ways.

Let us remember that we came from love and are going to love. How well are we living the dash in between, which is called our lives?

For Your Reflection:

- Who might I reach out to and spend time with? Do I know someone who is ill, lonely, suffering, or going through a difficult time?
- Who am I grateful for who has helped me through a difficult time or stayed with me through a season of grief? Have I ever thought that this was Christ serving me?
- Have I sat with someone going through a difficult time? A time when there was nothing I could do but be with that person. I didn't know the when, where, or how of the next moment, day, week, month, or year. Have I ever thought I was being Christ for that person? Or was it the suffering Christ in the person I was serving?

A song for some reflection: https://youtu.be/fotpjU7zkLU?si=ZA1dja_ZuqcEJwlv

*Loving God,
grant me the courage
to stay and pray, trusting in
Your presence and guidance
through all circumstances
Amen*