

# EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (HOLY THURSDAY)

Exodus = EK-suh-duhs

A reading that includes detailed instructions from God to Moses and Aaron to convey to the Israelites so that they will be prepared for the events now commemorated as Passover. The instructions have ritual power anticipating one of the most spectacular narratives in the Old Testament. Read these instructions with some reverence.

These details are part of the appeal of this reading. Don't rush through them.

Emphasis on "slaughtered."

## LECTIONARY #39

READING I Exodus 12:1–8, 11–14

### A reading from the Book of Exodus

The **LORD** said to **Moses** and **Aaron** in the land of **Egypt**,  
"This month shall **stand** at the head of your **calendar**;  
you shall **reckon** it the first month of the **year**.

Tell the **whole** community of **Israel**:

On the **tenth** of this month every one of your families  
must **procure** for itself a **lamb**, one apiece for each **household**.  
If a family is too **small** for a **whole lamb**,  
it shall **join** the nearest household in **procuring** one  
and shall **share** in the **lamb**

in **proportion** to the number of **persons** who **partake** of it.

The lamb must be a **year-old male** and without **blemish**.

You may **take** it from either the **sheep** or the **goats**.

You shall **keep** it until the fourteenth day of this **month**,  
and **then**, with the whole assembly of Israel present,  
it shall be **slaughtered** during the evening **twilight**.

They shall take **some** of its blood

and apply it to the **two doorposts** and the **lintel**  
of **every house** in which they **partake** of the **lamb**.

That **same night** they shall **eat** its roasted **flesh**  
with **unleavened bread** and bitter **herbs**.

### READING I

Holy Thursday, also called Maundy Thursday, is a commemoration of the synoptic Gospels' story of the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples before his death and a celebration of the institution of the Eucharist. Today's readings speak well to the robust, multilayered meanings attached to this feast.

In the first reading, we hear an account of the Passover ritual as explained in the Book of Exodus. It appears immediately after the announcement of the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of Egypt

(Exodus 11), and immediately before the execution of this tenth plague (Exodus 12:29–30). However, the ritual itself probably reflects a later period of development—in this case, a time when two separate rituals had been joined into one. The first is the ritual of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1–13) and the second is the ritual of the unleavened bread (Exodus 12:14–20). Here God is speaking to Moses, who will later describe the rituals to the Israelite peoples (see Exodus 12:21–27).

The ritual of the Passover lamb always occurred in the springtime and was con-

nected to the tenth plague by the directive to the Israelites to put the blood of the lamb on the door posts and lintels of the homes where they were eating the sacrificial meal, so that God would know to pass over those places and protect them from the destruction that would come upon Egypt, when God killed all of the firstborn. Although it is troubling for us to think about God doing such a terrible thing, we need to remember that the plagues were God's "weapons" in the battle with the hard-hearted pharaoh, who claimed divinity but was not really a god. Thus, Passover is a

girt = gert = belted

This line announces the purpose of this reading; it is followed by the grim details of God's judgment. Give them the emphasis they deserve.

For meditation and context:

"This is how you are to **eat** it:  
 with your loins **girt**, **sandals** on your **feet** and your **staff**  
 in hand,  
 you shall **eat** like those who are in **flight**.  
 It is the **Passover** of the **LORD**.  
 For on this **same night** I will go through **Egypt**,  
 striking down **every firstborn** of the land, both **man** and **beast**,  
 and **executing judgment** on all the **gods** of Egypt—I, the **LORD**!  
 But the **blood** will mark the **houses** where you are.  
**Seeing** the blood, I will **pass over** you;  
**thus**, when I strike the land of **Egypt**,  
**no destructive blow** will come **upon** you.  
 "This **day** shall be a **memorial feast** for you,  
 which **all** your generations shall **celebrate**  
 with **pilgrimage** to the **LORD**, as a **perpetual** institution."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18  
 (1 Corinthians 10:16)

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

How shall I make a return to the LORD  
 for all the good he has done for me?  
 The cup of salvation I will take up,  
 and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
 and I will call upon the name of the LORD.  
 My vows to the LORD I will pay  
 in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD  
 is the death of his faithful ones.  
 I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;  
 you have loosed my bonds.

joyous, anticipatory celebration of freedom from slavery, which God will surely and immediately win for the Israelites.

**READING II**

Our second reading, from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, is part of a longer teaching on how to share the Eucharist with integrity and attention to the welfare of the entire community. In the early centuries of Christianity, the Eucharist took place as part of a common meal in the homes of wealthy patrons. But someone, perhaps Chloe's people (see 1 Corinthians 1:11), told Paul

about the community's bad behavior when they gathered to eat the Lord's supper. Apparently, the wealthy arrived early and were eating and drinking to excess, so that, when the poor arrived, the food was gone. Not only were the lower-class members of the community hungry, but they were shamed by the fact that the wealthy had no regard for their need.

Paul is being extremely radical here. When the Christian community gathered for Eucharist, they were doing exactly what everyone else was doing at banquets, in keeping with cultural practices in the first-

century Mediterranean world. But Paul is fierce in his condemnation of the community's behavior, arguing that, "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Corinthians 11:29). Why? Paul recites the words of the institution of the Eucharist that was already in use in Christian communities, tracing them back to the authority of Jesus. Biblical scholars think that Paul might have altered the original wording by adding "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" to the statement, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood,"

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

A commemoration of the words at the heart of the Mass. These words of Paul's to the Corinthians are a Scriptural echo of the words in the reading from Exodus.

Here begin the words of institution, always spoken by a priest, but here, most likely, spoken by a lector. These words can take on a freshness in your proclamation.

In a slow, commemorative rhythm.

A reading that provides the basis for one of the most powerful of Christian rituals, the washing of feet. Its power resides in the directness of its depiction of the ritual itself but also the ways the act anticipates Christ's passion.

Iscairiot = ih-SKAYR-ee-uh

thereby highlighting the Eucharist as a commemoration of a supreme act of love, Jesus' death on a cross. The community should do likewise, no matter how radical it might seem. They should love even those who were different from themselves.

#### GOSPEL

At first glance, today's reading from the Gospel of John might seem like a strange choice for Holy Thursday. John's story of Jesus' last meal with his disciples is not a Passover meal. Rather, it takes place several days before Passover, because, in John's Gospel,

## READING II 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

### A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

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**.

## GOSPEL John 13:1–15

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

**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**.

The **devil** had already induced **Judas**, son of **Simon** the **Iscairiot**, to hand him over.

**So**, during supper,

**fully aware** that the **Father** had put **everything** into his **power** and that he had **come** from God and was **returning** to God, he **rose** from supper and took **off** his outer **garments**.

He took a **towel** and tied it around his **waist**.

Jesus is sentenced to death and crucified on the preparation day for Passover, when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple. Also, the story begins on an ominous note, by explaining that Jesus' "hour," that is, the time of his death and return to the Father, had come and that he had loved his own to the end or to the fullest. These verbs are aorist tense, which denotes a past action completed. The narrator also notes that Judas had already plotted to hand Jesus over to his enemies.

Today's reading describes a ritual of hospitality, the washing of feet, that would

have preceded any banquet in the first-century Mediterranean world. This was a fitting way to indicate to your guests a sense of welcome. However, this work would have been done not by the master of the household or the host of a dinner but by the master's slaves. Hence, we can sense Peter's horror as he watches Jesus remove his outer garment in preparation for work and engage in a slave's task to provide hospitality to his guests.

But this foot washing is so much more than an act of hospitality. When Peter protests that he wants no part in Jesus' self-

The details here are important.

Peter's inability to understand what Jesus is doing reflects the congregation's. Though Peter is a bit thick, Jesus is gentle but authoritative in his responses.

Emphasis on "feet washed."

These lines to the end of the reading are firm and mysterious.

**TO KEEP IN MIND**

Recognize how important your proclamation of the Word of God is. Prepare well and take joy in your ministry.

Then he **poured water** into a basin  
and **began** to wash the disciples' feet  
and **dry them** with the **towel** around his **waist**.  
He **came** to Simon **Peter**, who **said** to him,  
"Master, are you going to **wash** my feet?"  
Jesus answered and said to him,  
"What I am **doing**, you **do not** understand **now**,  
but you will **understand later**."  
Peter said to him, "You will **never** wash my feet."  
Jesus answered him,  
"Unless I **wash** you, you will have no **inheritance** with **me**."  
Simon Peter said to him,  
"Master, then not only my feet, but my **hands** and **head**  
as well."  
Jesus said to him,  
"Whoever has bathed has no **need** except to have his  
**feet washed**, for he is **clean** all over;  
**so you** are **clean**, but not all."  
For he **knew** who would **betray** him;  
for this **reason**, he said, "Not **all** of you are **clean**."  
So when he had **washed** their feet  
and put his **garments** back on and **reclined** at table again,  
he said to them, "Do you **realize** what I have **done** for you?  
You call me '**teacher**' and '**master**,' and rightly so, for **indeed**  
**I am**.  
If I, therefore, the **master** and **teacher**, have **washed** your feet,  
you ought to wash one another's feet.  
I have **given** you a model to **follow**,  
so that as I have done for **you**, **you** should also **do**."

shaming act, Jesus tells Peter that, if he refuses, he can have no part in what Jesus has in store for the disciples. Peter's response is somewhat humorous, because he takes Jesus' words literally and requests a full bath! John frequently uses this literary technique of having characters understand only the plain meaning of Jesus' words so that Jesus can go on to explain the deeper meaning. Thus, Jesus responds, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." The phrase "but not all" refers to Judas.

Biblical scholars have debated whether bathing is a reference to baptism. The Greek word is *louó*, meaning "to bathe or to wash," which can be applied in a variety of settings, but, at the very least, we can say that bathing is a symbol of abiding or remaining with Jesus. Abiding is the way this Gospel refers to discipleship. Now only the feet need to be washed. Why? The foot washing is an action and symbol of the extent to which the disciples must go to be servants of one another. They must follow Jesus' example of servanthood in loving others to the end.

And what about us? Are we willing to follow Jesus' example? For the author of John's Gospel, responding to the call of discipleship is more than pious thoughts. It requires that we be humble servants of all God's children. C.C.