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Dear Friend of the Missions!

It's hard to believe that Easter is so early in March, that it is right around the corner. I hope that you will be able to join in the Holy Week celebrations, especially the Easter Triduum. Pray particularly for those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil, they bring new life to the Church. As you renew your own baptismal promises, remember how we are always afforded a fresh start in the Easter Mysteries. Because of Easter being early this year, some feasts get shifted around. St. Joseph's feast day is celebrated this year on March 15. In many places, St. Patrick's feast will be on March 14. The Annunciation will be moved from March 25 to March 31. The 13 Tuesdays to prepare for the Feast of St. Anthony begin on March 18. Hopefully, spring will come in time to brighten the celebration of Easter. Be assured of the prayers of all our missionaries for you and your loved ones for your Easter intentions. Thank you so much for all you do for the missions. Blessed and Glorious Easter!



Holy Thursday: The Mass of the Lord's Supper

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

Love consecrates the humblest act and halos mercy's deeds; It sheds a benediction sweet And hallows human needs [Lutheran Book of Worship, 122].

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All of the events that we remember during the Paschal Triduum are the Lord's acts of mercy, humility and self-giving. Christ did all these things for our sake that we might be rescued from the power of sin. We recall these things so that we can affirm our belief in the saving mystery of Jesus Christ, and to remind us that what Christ has done for us, so must we do for one another. The Liturgy of Holy Thursday draws us back to *the night before he died*. Jesus, knowing that he was about to die, left us a memorial of his passion and death and, in word and deed, in symbol and sacrament, gave us the context within which we are to understand that passion, death and resurrection, and learn to live accordingly.

Passover. In celebrating the Passover Meal, Christ's death is seen as the culmination of all of the saving and liberating acts which God had performed for the sake of Israel. The liberation from



physical slavery is now a liberation from slavery at a much deeper level—the power of sin and death. The reading from Exodus draws our attention to the first Passover Meal. For the people of Israel, this is an important night when all of the people gather with their loved ones to remember what God had done for their ancestors, and to affirm what God was still doing for them.



On this festival day, every Jew is to think of themselves as having been personally brought out of Egypt, we ourselves will be liberated from all the new Egypts that can exist within our hearts or around our religious community [Haggadah for the Seder]. Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate this Passover Meal. After the resurrection, the disciples would see how this saving activity, done out of love for us, was intensified and realized in Jesus Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The appreciation of this great gift is expressed in the words of the psalmist: *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 [Ps 116].*

Eucharist. The reading from Paul brings us to the heart of the evening. The Eucharist is not any meal but a remembrance of something very special. This meal is intimately connected to the Cross of Christ and is, therefore, a sacrificial meal and a sign of the New Covenant. The meal, by which Christ anticipates his saving death and resurrection, is given to us to make present and proclaim for all ages the Paschal Mystery. The Church now joins Christ in offering the one, true sacrifice of praise. In giving us his body and blood as food and drink, Jesus shares his very self with his disciples and all those who would follow after him. In this way we are brought into intimate communion with him and with one another. Selfless love is made manifest.

*When in the shadow of the Cross Christ knelt and washed the feet
Of his disciples, he gave us a sign of love complete
[LBW, 122].*

Washing of the Feet. The Gospel does not give another account of the Eucharist, but recalls what happened as the disciples and Jesus began the meal. He washed the feet of his disciples and gave them a new commandment: *what I have done for you, so must you do for each other!* The event is ritualized for the community as the presider washes the feet of members of the community. Those who are in authority must serve the rest: this is the simple message that Jesus gives his followers. But this is not just once a year ritual for a bishop, pastor, or monastic or religious superior to perform to keep them humble. We must remember that all of us share responsibility for the community, and the ritual act should be a vivid reminder of the obligation of each of us to serve one another.



It is easy to forget the selfless love to which we are called in remembering the Passover and celebrating the Eucharist. Our focus can be too much on what God has done for us and too little on what we are supposed to do for one another. This act of Jesus, which we recall, puts everything back into perspective. Selfless giving is to beget selfless giving! Selfless sacrifice is to beget selfless sacrifice! Everything we have been given by God is not ours to hoard, but ours to share. Everything God had done for us is not ours to delight in, as much as it is ours to do for one another.

*Love serves and willing stoops to serve; What Christ in love so true
Has freely done for one and all, Let us now gladly do!
[LBW, 122].*



Care for the poor. The celebration of the Holy Thursday Liturgy Highlights selfless giving in another visible way. In the Holy Thursday liturgy an ancient custom is restored: gifts for the poor are to be brought up in the offertory Procession along with bread and wine for Mass. The liturgy recommends this processional song: *Where charity and love are found, there is God. The Love of Christ has gathered us into one. Let us rejoice and be glad in him. Let us fear and love the living God and love each other from the depths of our heart. Therefore when we are together, let us take heed not to be divided of mind. Let there be an end to bitterness and quarrels, an end to strife and in our midst be Christ our God....*

Watching and waiting. At the end of the Mass, the Eucharist for the Good Friday celebration and ministry to the sick and dying is taken to a place of resposition. The Pange Lingua, the beautiful reflection on the Eucharist by Thomas Aquinas, is sung. Everyone is encouraged to spend time in prayer as the Triduum gently moves to the next time the whole community gathers, the Solemn



Liturgical Service of Good Friday.

Paschal Fast. There was a tradition in the early Church that the whole community fast from the Mass of the Lord's Supper to the end of the Easter Vigil in solidarity with those who were being prepared for baptism. The Church encourages us to continue the tradition. This is a fast of anticipation and not a fast of penance. The Easter food, that we share to end this fast, highlights the joy of the resurrection.

It is in this context, with this perspective, that we remember the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord and fittingly begin the Paschal Triduum. *We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free.* (Entrance Antiphon for the Mass of the Lord's Supper)





**Please remember our friar missionaries
who celebrate birthdays this month:**

March 9: Fr. Donnon Murray, O.F.M. (Japan)

March 26: Fr. Callistus Sweeney, O.F.M. (Japan)

May God bless them with health and energy and peace!

**Please remember our present and former
missionaries who are ill:**

Bishop Benedict Coscia, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Joseph Ganssle, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

**May God give them health strength
and peace!**

Reflection Questions

1. How can you enter more fully into the celebrations of the Paschal Triduum?
2. What is the challenge of the Lord's selfless love?
3. Will service to the poor be a special part of the Triduum for me?
4. Will you use the specialness of this time to pray and reflect and not get too distracted from this most holy time?
5. What can you learn about baptism from seeing the newly baptized?