

Holy Week – Holy Thursday

Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his Apostles.

Holy Thursday brings to mind the Lord's Last Supper with the Apostles. As in previous years, Jesus celebrates the Passover with his own disciples. But this time the celebration would have singular characteristics, as it was to be the last Passover of the Lord before his transit to the Father and because of the events which were to take place immediately following it. Every minute of this Last Supper reflects both the Majesty of Jesus, who knows He is to die the following day, and his love and affection for men.

The Passover was the principal Jewish feast and had been instituted to commemorate the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian domination. This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever. [1516] Every Jew is obliged to celebrate this feast to keep alive the memory of the birth of the People of God.

For the special arrangements Jesus turned to his favourite disciples, Peter and John. These two made all the preparations with the greatest care. They took a lamb to the Temple and made a sacrifice of it. Then they returned to the house where the meal was to take place, to roast it. They also prepared water for the ablutions, (Ex 12:14) *the bitter herbs* (which represent the bitterness of slavery), *the unleavened bread* (in memory of their ancestors who had to interrupt their baking in the sudden flight from Egypt), the wine etc. They made a special effort so that everything would be just right.

These preparations remind us of the great pains we should take to prepare ourselves for each Mass we attend. Here the very same Sacrifice of Christ is to be renewed, wherein he gave himself for us; we too are his disciples, taking the place of Peter and John in their reverent and careful preparations for the Solemnity. The Last Supper begins with the setting sun. Jesus recites the psalms in a firm voice and in his familiar regional accent. St John has told us that Jesus ardently wished to have this meal with his disciples.

Singular events took place in that period, which the evangelists have recorded for us: take, for instance, the rivalry between the Apostles, who

began to discuss who was the greatest; think of Jesus' surprising example of humility and of service when he carried out the menial task of the lowest of the servants – he began to wash their feet ; consider, too, how Jesus went out of his way to show his disciples his love and affection. *My little ones, he actually calls them. Christ himself wished to give that gathering such a fullness of significance, so rich in memories, scene of such moving words and sentiments, such new actions and precepts, that we will never come to an end of meditating on them and exploring them. It was, you might say, a testimonial dinner: it was an affectionate and yet a sombre occasion, a time mysteriously revealing divine promises and far-reaching visions. On top of that was the sad presentiment of death, with unprecedented omens of treason, of abandonment, of immolation; the conversation dies away, while Jesus' words flow continuously in his gentle and winning voice, though there is an unwonted tension in his grave allusion to profound revelations, the matter of which hovers between life and death.*(Paul VI, Homily, Holy Thursday)

What Christ did for his own may be summarised in a few words from St John: *he loved them to the end.* To-day is a particularly appropriate day for meditating on the love Jesus has for each one of us, and how we respond to it: in regular dealings with him, in love for the Church, in acts of atonement and reparation, in charity towards others, in preparation and in thanksgiving for Holy Communion, in our desire to co-redeem with Him, in our hunger and thirst for justice ...