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Holy Thursday: "Serve one another as I have served you"

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

You may remember in the Eucharistic Prayer that I usually use when I celebrate the Eucharist here, there is a part where the confirmation says, "Jesus now lives with you ? that is, with God ? but He is also here on Earth among us." We proclaim that during the Eucharistic Prayer. Jesus is with God, but He's also here on earth among us.

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On this evening when we celebrate what Jesus did on that last night before He died, we're very much aware of how Jesus is here on earth among us. Over the bread He says, "This is My body," and the wine, "This is the cup of My blood."

Holy Thursday

We understand. Jesus is really, truly present under those forms of bread and wine, and we eat and drink Jesus so that we become more deeply enveloped with His life.

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18

So He really is here on earth among us, but if we listen carefully to the readings tonight, we discover that it's not only in the Blessed Sacrament that Jesus is here on earth among us. It's within every one of us in this community of His disciples.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-15

Jesus is living. He's present. Just as truly as Jesus is in the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus is living here on earth among us because of the reading.

In that letter to the Corinthians that made up our second lesson tonight, Paul also says this: as the body is

one, having many members and all the members while being many form one body, so it is with Christ Jesus. All of us, whether Jews or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor, male or female, all of us have been baptized in one spirit to form one body, and all of us have been given to drink from the one spirit.

Jesus is alive in every one of us, and in a very strong and special way, within the community of His disciples here, St. Ann's Parish community here, but in the Church throughout the world.

Jesus is alive and is present within us, among us. That's why we have to listen with special care to the second lesson tonight.

We heard just a very small part of the passage where Paul describes what we call the institution of the Blessed Sacrament. As I mentioned before, this is the oldest description of what happened at the Last Supper. We just heard a small part of it, but before that part, Paul says this. He's talking to this community that he loves very much, but a community that he is very angry with.

"To continue with my advice, I cannot praise you for your gatherings are not for the better, but for the worst." See, they had gathered, as the early Church did, in a home and they were celebrating a meal, and from that meal they would go on and celebrate the Eucharist.

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Paul says, "I can't praise you, and here's why. For I have heard when you've gathered together, there are divisions among you. Your gatherings are no longer the supper of the Lord, for each one eats of his or her own food while another is hungry."

See, they have separated themselves within this home and those that are rich have plenty to eat and drink and they're neglecting the poor who also are part of the Body of Jesus, and that makes Paul very angry, that right as they're celebrating, gathered together as the community of Jesus, brothers and sisters to Jesus, they begin to push some away. You're too poor. You're the wrong color. You're the wrong nationality, or whatever it is, male, female, rich, poor, Greek, slave, slave or free. There are divisions, so your gatherings are no longer the supper of the Lord.

Paul says, "Do you not have houses within which to eat or drink, or perhaps you despise the Church of God and desire to humiliate those who have nothing." They are pushed or pulled aside. They're not worthy of our attention.

So it's then that Paul says that, "This is the tradition that I received and that in my turn, I handed on to you," and then he tells us about how at the Last Supper, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it and said, "This is My body," and with the cup of wine, "This is the cup of My blood."

Then Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone eats of the bread or drinks of the cup of the Lord unworthily, you sin against the body and blood of the Lord."

We would think almost right away, "That means if we came and weren't worthy to receive the Eucharist, we were in sin," but it's more than that.

Let each one examine then yourself before eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. Otherwise you eat and drink your own condemnation in not recognizing the body of Jesus in all of us.

Paul was so concerned, not just about the Blessed Sacrament which we reverence and adore, but that we

respect and love one another because each of us is the living presence of Jesus and that's why Jesus gets down on His knees before those disciples and in spite of Peter's protestations, He performs the most menial service that He can do.

He wants to show them how much He reverences each one, and remember, He said, "You call Me Lord and Master, and I am." At the beginning of that Gospel, John says Jesus knew that He had come from God and He was going to God.

He knew who he was, Son of God, and yet, He so revered that gathering that night that He wanted to wash their feet to show how much He loved them. He would do anything for them.

As we listen then to these Scriptures tonight and we understand fully what is happening, and how we are the presence of Jesus in our world, what are we going to do about it? How do we look upon one another in our own parish family, in our family at home or in our civil family, our community? Do we make division, separate the poor from the rich, or do we push women aside and not give them full equality? How do we treat one another?

That's what Paul wants us to look at tonight when he reminds us that all of us are the Body of Jesus.

Jesus lives now with God in glory, but He's here on earth among us, within us. There are many ways in which we need to increase our sense of reverence for one another, certainly eliminate any violence within our community, within our domestic community.

Certainly we must do that, but if we really reverence Jesus living among us, wouldn't we follow what the bishops of this state have called upon us to do, to contact our governor and tell him it's not right to deprive the poor of this state of that earned tax income credit? See that's something that we should be doing.

The bishops of this state have made that their number one priority as our state government tries to deal with the problems of our deficit, but not to do it by taking it out on the poor.

If we really are listening to what God is telling us tonight through this word, we will deepen our love and respect for one another, and for every other person in whom Jesus lives. "I, your Lord and Master, have done this as an example for you, and I ask you now to serve one another as I have served you."

[Bishop Gumbleton gave this homily at St. Ann Catholic Church in Frankfort, Mich.]

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