

## FR. PETER'S HOLY THURSDAY HOMILY

As we heard in tonight's first Reading, the central symbol of the Passover was the lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts and lintel of the houses of the Israelites living as slaves in Egypt.

Then the flesh of the lamb was eaten so that those who ate became one with the lamb which had been sacrificed to save them.

In the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in the account we heard read from First Corinthians, Jesus gathers the apostles to celebrate the Passover on the night before he died.

It was to be his Last Supper during which he gave to them the supreme gift of the Eucharist as the memorial of his upcoming death and resurrection. In the course of that meal, Jesus takes the unleavened bread and identifies it as his Body which the disciples are to eat.

He takes the cup of wine and identifies it as his Blood, the Blood of the new covenant, which they are to drink. Then Jesus commands them, "Do this in remembrance of me."

In the Gospel according to John, there is no final Passover supper celebrated by Jesus and the Twelve. John tells us that their last meal takes place, "before the feast of Passover."

According to the dynamic of John's theology, Passover that year begins on Good Friday, and Jesus dies upon the cross as the Passover lambs are being sacrificed.

In the very first chapter of his Gospel, John identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

John's theological vision is fulfilled in the Book of Revelation when he describes the liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem centered around the "Lamb who was slain."

As the drama of the Book of Revelation reaches its climax, the participants in the heavenly liturgy sing the hymn of the "Wedding Feast of the Lamb."

My brothers and sisters, Holy Thursday celebrates the gift of the Holy Eucharist to the Church, the Bride of Christ.

This year we find ourselves in the final year of our country's Eucharistic Revival. We are reminded in a particular way that the sacred Mass in which we are privileged to participate is the fulfillment of the Passover of old and the foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in heaven.

As we eat the Flesh of the Lamb under the sign of bread, and as we drink His Blood under the sign of wine, we are brought into communion with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and his eternal offering of that sacrifice before the throne of the Father.

Jesus is our High Priest who offers, not the blood of sheep or bullocks, but his own Precious Blood, which is not smeared on the entry of a building, but rather is received by our lips into our very souls.

And what is the purpose of all of this?

We are to become what we eat or, more precisely, we become Who we eat.

In the Eucharist we are given the nourishment and the strength we need to become more like Jesus who said to the apostles and to us, "If I, your master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet."

As Jesus poured out his life in service to others, so we are called and challenged to pour out our lives in ministry and mission, in acts of charity, mercy, and justice.

There is a beautiful saying attributed to St. Theresa of Avila:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands nor feet on earth but yours."

Jesus wants to be present in our world through you and me.

And it is only by living lives of service that we will share the destiny of those whom John describes in the Book of Revelation as "the ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."