

Holy Thursday

There are **two extraordinary acts** of Jesus that we recall this evening, and they both occurred on the night before he died.

Paul makes reference to **Jesus' gift of himself**, echoing the tradition that was handed on to him, and which is emphasized in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

John presents Jesus not only as the gift, but the **one who gives**. "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Both of these acts **invite us to respond**. What sort of response would be appropriate?

The **first act** of Jesus can be seen as an **invitation to contemplation**. As church, we understand the call issued at the Last Supper as a sacramental summons to the Table of the Lord in the Eucharist.

But **what does it mean to receive the Body and Blood of Christ?** It is more than an invitation to dinner.

It is **not merely about consumption** attached to a religious ritual.

It is **not about eating for our own satisfaction**.

We **consume and are consumed by the reality of the Body of Christ**. The famous scripture scholar, Walter Bruggemann, has put it this way:

"The bread you eat will claim your heart."

As we continually incorporate the Body and Blood of Christ into our very selves, weekly, perhaps daily, over a lifetime, **we also choose to be incorporated** into the life of Christ.

We **take into our bodies in a very literal way the bread and the wine**.

As Catholics, we profess the belief that **we also take into ourselves the essence of Christ**.

At the same time we are **pledging our willingness to be taken into the Body of Christ**, the church, and to reveal the life of Christ to others.

It is an astounding belief, and an even more astounding proposal to which we pledge ourselves.

What **contemplation** of this mystery **offers is the opportunity** to make this sacramental act **more deliberate**, less perfunctory.

We dwell on the gift and know gratitude. We contemplate the responsibility, and sense the seriousness of the consequences of our choice.

To incorporate and be incorporated into the Body of Christ is **to share ever more deeply** in the healing, forgiving, loving **ministry of Jesus**.

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This leads us to the **second great act** of Holy Thursday: the washing of the feet of the disciples.

are called to do, In doing, we become even more.

Jesus is not only gift, but giver. He **gives example**, and the model is service.

This is the call to apostolate.

We know it **is not enough to consider** the life of Christ dwelling within us as a prize to possess.

The **gift is not given for our own enlightenment** or to increase a quotient of personal holiness in us.

Personal salvation has never been the point of Christianity, the “getting to heaven approach” to religion.

Jesus didn't come to be a personal savior, but to be the salvation of all humanity, to be “all in all.”

Once we possess the life of Christ for ourselves, we are **immediately called upon to respond** in service.

Only in this way can we **share that life with others**, which is the purpose for which the gift is given.

This is clear from the **way Jesus follows the sign of the meal with the activity of the foot washing.**

Contemplation and action are the **two great signs** we celebrate at the start of our three holy days. **In becoming, we**