

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

Preparing for Holy Thursday

As we prepare to celebrate this wonderful liturgy we begin by entering into a new movement. As this liturgy begins, Lent has ended. Our 40 days of Lent helped us "prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mystery with mind and heart renewed." Now we come to three liturgies which help us experience what is offered us in the new Passover. Each liturgy helps us enter more deeply into the mystery and meaning. Holy Thursday evening takes us to the heart of the gift and to our mission.

The Elect and the Children.

We begin with the Catechumens and Candidates with whom we have been journeying all year. If there are no persons preparing for full communion with us in our parish, or if we have not been aware of them, this is the time to become conscious of and sensitive to the Elect, in our community, our city and around the world. Through the rites of Acceptance and Election, our brothers and sisters have grown to "hunger" for communion with us. We have welcomed them, blessed them, anointed them, and cared for them as our own. For the last three weeks we have prayed for them and supported them in the temptations that come at the end of a long journey.

Each Sunday, as we dismissed them after the homily and before the "Prayer of the Faithful," we told them that we "longed for the day" when we could be with them at the table of the Lord. Throughout the year, our care for them helps us understand who we are, the way a good teacher learns more about a subject through the process of education.

On this night, we act out the meaning of the Eucharist, the meaning of salvation, and the meaning of discipleship.

We remember our children, whom we are continually forming in the life of our faith community. All our community's "religious education" comes to a special focus for our youngest members.

This Holy Thursday liturgy has the Elect in mind, and it is a wonderful night for children. On this night we "act out" the meaning of the Eucharist, the meaning of our salvation, and the meaning of discipleship. In our preparing for Holy Thursday, it helps to enter into this

experience as a member of a community that desires to "show" to our newest and youngest members, who we are and who we desire to be.

The Word.

To begin to prepare, let us read the readings of this Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. Our chewing starts here, as does our nourishment. The Exodus account of the Passover tradition reminds us of the exit, the liberation, of the people

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in slavery in Egypt, and meal that commemorates it. "This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate." During our Lenten journey, we have desired greater freedom, and a deeper liberation from the patterns that keep us from being free. We want to come to the Holy Thursday memorial with those desires alive with hunger and thirst.

Psalm 116 asks, "How shall I make a return to the LORD for all the good he has done for me?" The word, "eucharist" means "thanksgiving." To come to this night prepared to celebrate, we can reflect on all the reasons we have to be grateful. The Spirit of Jesus uses the gift of gratitude to gather us for Eucharist.

Paul tells us the simple and profound words of Jesus, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The gift and the mandate. And Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." Our celebration on Holy Thursday will show us how to proclaim the meaning of the Lord's gift to us.

John's gospel is a puzzle and a revelation. The account of the

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In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a **Lenten Daily Prayer** for each day of Lent.

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Last Supper in this gospel does not include the narrative Paul gives us, as do the accounts in Mark, Matthew and Luke. In this account of the Last Supper, Jesus does not take bread and wine, say the prayer of thanksgiving, break the bread and share the cup, with the words, "This is my body; this is my blood; do this in memory of me." In this

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narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus washes his disciples' feet. With this ritual Jesus shows us how he gives us his body and allows his blood to be poured out for us. By his action Jesus says, here I am as servant for you, do this in memory of me.

The Foot Washing.

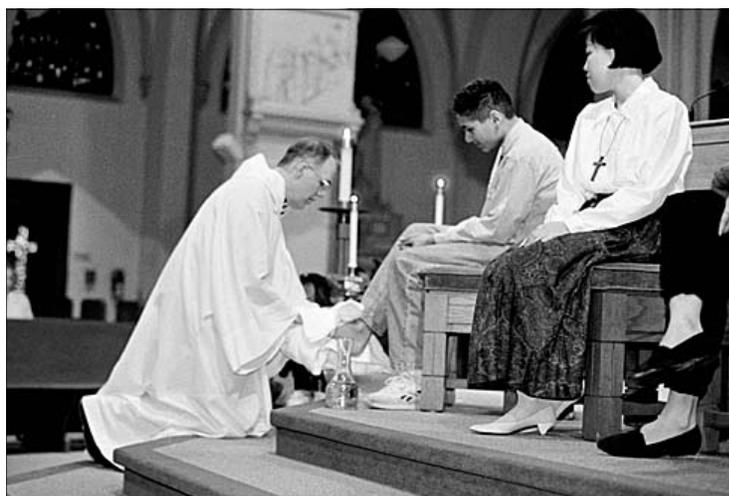
It is not enough for us to simply hear this gospel and to "break open" this word in a homily. Our tradition is to engage us in the drama of this ritual. So, it is not enough to simply go to the Holy Thursday liturgy and "watch" it happen. We need to prepare.

In the ritual we will experience on Holy Thursday, Jesus washes our feet. The twelve representatives of our community have their feet washed, but each of us is having our feet washed. Each of us needs to "feel" the resistance of Peter. We have to "let" Jesus wash our feet, let Jesus give himself to us, let him be our servant.

One of the best preparations is to "taste" my resistance, my independence, my rationalizing which almost convinces me that I don't need washing or healing or saving. Perhaps I need to "name" the part of my life, the part of myself, I want to surrender to the Lord to be embraced and loved, washed and healed. Perhaps on Thursday morning, I can stand in the shower and experience the Lord's love pour over me. Or, if I live in a part of the world where water is not so plentiful, I can wash my face slowly and thankfully. Preparing is a matter of opening our hearts to the gift we will ritualize on Holy Thursday.

In the ritual we will experience on Holy Thursday, Jesus gives us a "mandate." He gives us the one commandment of the gospel, "Love one another, as I have loved you." He gives his very self to us, is broken and poured out, and calls us to give our very selves, to be broken and poured out, in love for others. It is important for us to "taste" our resistance to love.

We can come to Holy Thursday prepared by our reflection on how difficult it is to love some people, either because we recoil at their "smelly-ness" or because we find them unattractive or unable to love us in return. The liberation happens when we let ourselves have our feet washed by Jesus. Then Eucharist flows from our gratitude. Gratitude is the seed for great loving - the "return" I can make to the Lord for his great love for me.



Just as the foot washing isn't just about those twelve representatives, it isn't just about me and the family and friends I need to love. This ritual can be as big as we prepare to let it be. The love of Jesus is for all of God's people. We need to come to Holy Thursday with the whole world in our hearts. The mandate to love, as Jesus loves, calls us to be people whose self giving love reaches out to all who need liberation and the dignity God desires.

The Table of the Lord.

Now we are prepared for the Eucharist. Now we can say, with a much louder voice, "It is right to give God thanks and praise!" Now, when we remember and celebrate how he loved us, the words are joined to the ritual of foot washing, servanthood, ministry for others. Now, when we open our hands to receive his body and blood, we can feel, with great devotion, the power of this gift and the meaning of its mission.

The Stripping of the Altar and Sanctuary.

Our final preparation is to be ready to appreciate the ritual of transition with which Holy Thursday concludes. The Body and Blood of Jesus, which we share at this Eucharist is taken to a special place, so that we might continue to be nourished with this Sacrament on Good Friday.

Then our liturgy engages us in a rich ritual. The altar and the whole sanctuary are stripped bare. With this solemn gesture, we ritualize what we as a community are doing to prepare for Good Friday. We strip our focus down to Jesus alone. All the signs and symbols are put aside. We are left with the taste of the Eucharist and the gratitude in our hearts. We leave in focused silence. We leave with the image of Jesus, as servant for us, our hearts readied to celebrate the mystery of his passion and death for us.