

Tonight we remember 3 gifts from Jesus: the Eucharist, the priesthood, and the commandment to love.

**Gift number one: the Eucharist.** Jesus makes changes to the Passover meal that celebrates the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Through bread and wine, he anticipates the sacrifice of his life, where He becomes the Passover lamb. His blood will save us from the spiritual death caused by our sins. As God liberated his people from slavery in Egypt, Jesus will liberate us from our sins that bar us from heaven.

Jesus introduces the Eucharist so we remember his sacrifice for us forever. It's where he continues to be really present with us, to always be there for us, because he loves us. It looks back to his sacrifice on the cross, and forward to his Second Coming for us. God gives us the Eucharist not because we're good, but because God is good. Our sins have no power over God's generosity.

The Eucharist is also medicine for our wounded souls; for those times when we feel unlovable, or worthless; when we have difficulty trusting other people because we've been hurt before; when we only see our crosses, not the joys and beauty of life and friendships. We become so preoccupied by the storms of our lives that we forget we belong to the Lord of the storms.

The Eucharist reminds us of the bigger picture: God loves us unconditionally, through and through, just for who we are. And when we know we are loved, we become stronger, and are more able to love in return. We are created for loving.

**Gift number two: the Priesthood.** Jesus establishes the priesthood with his words "Do this in memory of me;" The apostles and their successors continue to make him present in all the sacraments we celebrate together. Please pray for priests, for vocations to priesthood. We American priests are now the minority of priests in our diocese. God bless our missionaries from other countries, but we need American priests. Pray that parents encourage their sons who express a desire to serve in ministry. I love being a priest! I am truly fulfilled in my work. And I've received more love now than I ever could have imagined. No nooky, but much love.

**Gift number three: Jesus's commandment to love,** by serving others, helping others. It's dramatically expressed when he washes the dirt and animal dung off his disciples' feet. Poopie on the streets, poopie on the feet. He serves his disciples to demonstrate how we are to relate to one another. And he proves his unlimited love for us shortly after the Last Supper in his agony: the beatings and scourging he endured, his excruciating crucifixion, and death on a cross like a criminal. He seeks to instill in us to love God and others just as he loves us.

Being a Christian is more than just being nice. It means we build our lives around a relationship with Jesus Christ, and following him and his example, and making him part of our family celebrations, like prayer and communion.

Through the Eucharist, the priesthood and the command to love, God reminds us of how much he cares about us; that he has not given up on us and will never give up on us.

How different the world would be if more and more of us followed Christ's example, thinking first about making life better for those around us. Let's strive for this, because the distinguishing mark of a Christian is precisely this kind of serving, helping, sacrificial, self-forgetting love.

Fr. John Ozella, Holy Thursday, April 18, 2019