

In Coena Domini

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Reception of the Holy Oils has become part of our liturgical celebration. The oils have been blessed and consecrated at the Chrism Mass by the Bishop and now are received by the parish community so that everyone witness the Sacramental Unity of the Body of Christ, the Church:

Deacon: *The oil of the sick.*

Priest: *May the sick who are anointed with this oil experience the compassion of Christ and his saving love, in body and soul.*

People: *Blessed be God forever.*

Deacon: *The oil of catechumens.*

Priest: *Through anointing with this oil may our catechumens who are preparing to receive the savings waters of baptism be strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms.*

People: *Blessed be God forever.*

Deacon: *the Holy Chrism.*

Priest: *Through anointing with this perfumed Chrism may children and adults, who are baptized and confirmed, and presbyters, who are ordained, experience the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit.*

People: *Blessed be God forever.*

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B. Our First Reading is from the book of Exodus. In it we read prescriptions on how to celebrate the Paschal meal. The last words indicate the communitarian meaning of this Jewish Paschal Meal: it is a *zicaron* or memorial of Israel liberation from bondage in Egypt; *"It is the Lord's Passover."*

C. Ps 116 makes reference to the Sacrifice of Praise which all Israel was invited to offer as commemoration of God's *mirabilia*. The refrain is taken from 1 Corinthians and links liturgically the old Sacrifice of Praise with the New Covenant. The self-offering of Christ's body and soul at the altar of the Cross renders idle any attempt of our part to offer something to God. The only pleasing sacrifice to the Father is that of his Only Son. The Church understands this very well and thus offers at the Eucharist nothing other than the sacramental *anamnesis* or memorial of Christ's own oblation *"Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ."*

D. St. Paul gives us the earliest account of the Institution of the Eucharist. The emphasis that Paul gives to the Tradition is remarkable: he hands down to us what he in turn received (*Paradosis = Tradere*). But goes on further to give as a parenthesis in which he describes how and why we should Holy Communion: *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."*

E. John gives us the third aspect of our celebration: the commandment on Love. This precept is a moral imperative for all Christians. Jesus sets himself as example of

Love understood as service of God and neighbor and total self-donation. Let us remember that if Jesus gives us the precept it is because he has loved us first and has given us the means to love others as he does: *"I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."*

III. *Meditatio*

A. **Christ institutes the Sacrament of Love.** We begin the Most Holy Triduum with this evening's celebration: *"In Coena Domini."* While the Institution of the Eucharist seems to be highlighted the most; the truth is that the same Missal makes it evident that there are two other things to be taken into account as we meditate on the meaning of Holy Thursday: Institution of Priesthood, and the Commandment of Love. The Institution of the Ministerial Priesthood and that of the fraternal precept of Love are, in fact, intrinsically united to the Sacrament of the Eucharist in as much as they are concrete expressions of fraternity. The Eucharist fosters and creates the community by inviting all to participate of the same Bread. The Priest has been made to confect the Eucharist *In Persona Christi* so that the sacrament of Christ's auto-donation may kindle in the hearts of those receiving Communion the gift of Love for God and neighbor.

B. **Christ washes the feet of the Twelve as a sign and model of all love.** In today's Gospel we read that Jesus performs this prophetic action in order to set an example for all the 12 to follow. The Jesus' loving act, as any gift of love, becomes for us a sacrament that is a visualization or incarnation of this one and unique reality: *God's love for his Son and the Son's love for his Father.* This love is everlasting and ever flowing so that we, who were created in the image of the Son (Col 1:15ff), by his grace may participate plentifully of such outpouring of Love. The depth of that intra-Trinitarian love will always remain a mystery for us; but we cannot ignore the reality of this continuous event. Every time we do an act of love we are reflecting God's Intra-Trinitarian Love; and even more so, when we celebrate the Sacramental Expression of such love in the Eucharist.

C. **Jesus gives of himself as the Eucharistic Bread of this celebration.** By calling to mind the anniversary of the event of the Last Supper our liturgy today zooms in the one of the fundamental pillars of our faith: the Church's Memory is called to show forth sacramentally the sign of Jesus' gratuitous, total and definite love. Christ is the true Lamb of God which fulfils the project of liberation begun by Moses in the first Exodus. His self-donation at the Cross is the beginning of a new and permanent presence in the Church: His immolated body is the food which strengthens us and his blood outpoured is the drink which redeems us of all sin. To participate consciously of the Eucharist, Memorial of Christ's Sacrifice, implies that we should have the same respect for the Body of Christ the Church and for His Eucharistic Body. The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist by the words of Christ himself (Mt 25) has to be extended, though in a different mode, to the person of our brothers and sisters. In this great mystery, thus, whoever discriminates against others and puts obstacles to the communion of the Church has been self-incapacitated to recognize the Body of Christ.

D. **Priesthood, born of the Eucharist, is a gift that fosters unity and love.** The Second Vatican Council affirms that: *"[Presbyters] by the power of the sacrament of Orders, in the image of Christ the Eternal High Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel and*

shepherd be faithful and to celebrate divine worship, so that they are true priests of the New Testament. Partakers of the function of Christ the sole Mediator, on their level of ministry, they announce the divine word to all. They exercise their sacred function especially in the Eucharistic worship or the celebration of the Mass by which acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His Mystery they unite the prayers of the faithful with the sacrifice of their Head and renew and apply in the sacrifice of the Mass until the coming of the Lord the only sacrifice of the New Testament namely that of Christ offering Himself once for all a spotless Victim to the Father” (LG § 28).

III. Oratio

A. We gather this evening to commemorate the memorable Supper in which “[God’s] only Son left to his Church to reveal his love. He gave it to us when he was about to die and commanded us to celebrate it as the new and eternal sacrifice.” (OP) Because Christ has offered himself on the Throne of the Cross we should only glorify ourselves in his Cross: “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free.” (EA) Christ ordered his disciples to perpetuate his offering here on earth by sacramentally celebrating the Memorial of his Death and Resurrection in the Eucharist. This is the meaning of Today’s Preface: “He is the true and eternal priest who established this unending sacrifice. He offered himself as a victim for our deliverance and taught us to make this offering in his memory. As we eat his body which he gave for us, we grow in strength. As we drink his blood which he poured out for us, we are washed clean.” (Preface) Each time we partake of this Banquet we are sacramentally celebrating the memorial of Christ Passion and so each time we eat or drink; we are eating and drinking our own salvation: “Each time we offer this memorial sacrifice, the work of our redemption is accomplished.” (PG) As a matter of fact, today’s celebration is not only a sacrificial banquet, it is also a Banquet of Love that sacramentally anticipates that which will take place in the Kingdom of Heaven: “May we find full contentment in the meal we hope to share in your eternal kingdom.” (PC) As we receive Holy Communion we are reminded that we are eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Jesus Christ: “This body will be given for you. This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.” (CA).

B. Traditionally on this Mass the roman Canon is recited for the Eucharistic Prayer. We should be mindful that it has proper parts for this Liturgical Celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

C. Eucharistic Procession follows our celebration is one of the few Liturgical Procession we have in our Liturgy. It should be done reverently and conducive to prayer so that the faithful remain in adoration: like Jesus who left the cenacle and went to Gethsemane to pray contemplatively to His father in Heaven.

III. Contemplatio

*The Lamb that was slain has delivered us from death and
given us life*

From an Easter homily by Melito of Sardis, 2nd century

There was much proclaimed by the prophets about the mystery of the Passover: that mystery is Christ, and to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

For the sake of suffering humanity he came down from heaven to earth, clothed himself in that humanity in the Virgin's womb, and was born a man. Having then a body capable of suffering, he took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow.

He was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, as he had ransomed Israel from the hand of Egypt; he freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls with his own Spirit and the members of our body with his own blood.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, as Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning. He is the One that smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of tyranny into an eternal kingdom; who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own forever. He is the Passover that is our salvation.

It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Isaac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonored in the prophets.

It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung on the tree; it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, the slain lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe. He was seized from the flock, dragged off to be slaughtered, sacrificed in the evening, and buried at night. On the tree no bone of his was broken; in the earth his body knew no decay. He is the One who rose from the dead, and who raised man from the depths of the tomb.