

In our first reading, we hear of the very first Passover and the words of God saying. **"This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution."**

Since that first event, some changes developed over time, Certain traditions were added, such as the serving of four cups of wine to everyone at the meal. These cups were used to mark the shifting of one part of the meal to the other. The addition of scripture readings and singing of certain Psalms were added for pious reasons.

But one change was made by necessity.

At the time of the first Passover, all Fathers were priests, able to sacrifice on behalf of their family. That ended in the desert when God commanded that priests will only be called from the tribe of Levi, and only those priests could make Holy Sacrifices to God, first in the Tent of Meeting that travelled with the Israelites through the desert, and then, in the Temple, once it was built in Jerusalem. The sacrifice of the Passover Lamb was a blood sacrifice, done in the Temple and only by Levite priests.

The command to make a pilgrimage to the Lord was fulfilled by going to the Temple at Passover to witness this Sacrifice.

What has remained constant has been the "remembering" of the first Passover. Remembering, in this Jewish sense was more than just a memorial, something that jogs the memory. The account of the first Passover is remembered as it is told, as it was done then, and just as it is done now, by the head of the Jewish family and the story is always recalled in the present tense.

God commanded ME to sacrifice a lamb, God commanded ME to paint MY door with the blood of the lamb. I ate the Passover, and with a strong hand God delivers ME from MY bondage.

In this Jewish “Remembering” there is no distinction between past and present. All are present at the first Passover.

That is the Catholic understanding of the Mass as well. That at every Mass we are present at the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Tonight there is something different in the Mass, that is, the ritual washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus. But the sense of being truly present on that night is the same.

Washing feet was not a part of the Passover, but rather was a custom of courtesy that a host offered to his guests. And it was performed by the lowliest member of the household, and if the host owned slaves, it would be the job of a slave to cleanse the feet of the guests.

When Jesus washed the feet of His Apostles, He took on the lowliest of the most common of acts, but He “rose from supper” to do this. Something new was happening, a break from tradition, a break from protocol.

Christ is very clear to them as to why He had washed their feet.

**If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."**

But in the mind and hearts of the Apostles, it was clear that THIS particular Passover meal was to be VERY different than any before it.

While the air hung heavy with the scent of roasted lamb, there must have been, in that room, palpable senses of wonder, curiosity, confusion and foreboding.

At the appropriate time in the Passover meal, Jesus, as their Rabbi or Teacher, said the standard Jewish blessing over the bread but He changed the narrative.

Remaining in the present tense, He said “Take and eat, this IS my body”.

Then at the appropriate time, Jesus said the traditional Jewish prayer over the wine and again changed the narrative, saying that “This is my blood of the new Covenant, poured out for many”

But wait, only a Priest could offer a blood sacrifice and only God could institute a covenant with His people.

The disciples may not have understood the full implication of Jesus’ words and actions, but there was no mistaking the command to take and eat and to take and drink. And to remember Him in the same sense that they remembered the first Passover.

In pronouncing a new covenant, the Levitical priesthood was abolished in favor of a new priesthood of the apostles, in particular, and their successors, Bishops who pass on this priesthood to men, called not from a tribe but from among all the baptized.

The Sacrifice of the Lamb of God was to come the next day and would be the first and final bloody sacrifice of this new covenant, but it would be repeated in perpetua in the ever-present but unbloody sacrifice of the Mass. The institution of the formal Priesthood established that night would be tasked with the daily celebration of Mass.

Passover comes full circle.

At every encounter with the Mass, the Scriptures are proclaimed, the blessings pronounced by a Spiritual Father a priest. We eat the NEW Passover meal as a family

We move together into a new Exodus as we are continually being led out of the slavery of sin into the freedom Christ.

We are the people of the new and final covenant, serving one another, regardless of wealth or stature, place or position, all are equal in the dignity of Christ.

And it is because of that dignity, we... wash... feet. Symbolically tonight, but in reality everytime we encourage another, lift the fallen, feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless. We wash feet even in something so small as being a listening ear, or a smiling face or offering a simple prayer.

And at every Mass, we are sent out to do just that. But not tonight, as we acknowledge that these three sacred days are one event, beginning in the Upper room and ending with an empty tomb.

Tonight, in the Tradition of the Church, we make an extra-ordinary pilgrimage to the Lord. The final part of our liturgy tonight will be a solemn procession of our Lord truly present in the Eucharist to a place of repose. All are invited to stay and spend some time in His presence.