

“Why is this night different from all other nights?” In the Jewish Passover meal, this is the first of 4 questions asked, usually by a child to an adult. And then the story is told again of how God, with a firm hand, took mercy on the tribes of Israel. How He took them out of slavery in Egypt by a mighty sign and the death of all the firstborn males of all of Egypt’s households and of all their animals.

We hear about this first Passover meal in the first reading. There are certain conditions that God asks of His people, that they find a lamb that is spotless, that they eat its flesh and that the blood of the lamb be a marking in their homes. If all of these conditions were met, then the Angel of Death would ‘pass-over’ their homes and all within them would live. Now, what is implied here is that if anyone did not eat the lamb, if anyone did not mark their dwellings with the blood of that same lamb - then the firstborn of that family will die along with the Egyptians.

The Gospel tonight paints a picture for us that is a bit different. The setting is the Passover meal, in a room provided for Jesus and His disciples by a friend. Although it is not stated, we can be assured that what was on the table was the traditional Passover meal to be eaten in the same manner as was described by our first reading.

“Why is this night different from all other nights?” one of the Disciples may have asked.

This was to be a very different Passover.

This time, God would deliver us by an act of mercy, not by a mighty hand, but by submission to the will of the Father. Jesus, knowing He was about to be delivered up to His death uses... a gentle hand to show an act of love and mercy to His disciples. One of these would betray Him, three of them would fall asleep in the Garden - one will deny Him three times and all

would flee from Him that night. Yet, He washed all of their feet because He loved them all to the end.

Can you imagine that?

And after this tender and intimate exchange, He sits down to eat the Passover meal with them.

“Why is this night different from all other nights?”

On this night, Jesus gave us a New Covenant, a new set of commands, a new way of being intimate with Him.

The first command was to wash one another’s feet, that is, to be a humble servant to others. This humility, this giving of ourselves is intimately tied to the next commands.

St. Matthew told us last Sunday that “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.”* Then he took a cup of wine, gave thanks,* and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to Him, he said those around Him - Behold the Lamb of God. Tomorrow, this Lamb will go to the final and complete Sacrifice. He Himself will become the Lamb whose flesh WE must eat, whose Blood we must share so that the death we deserve will pass over us and we can live. And by this same sacrifice, we are led out of slavery to sin and into fullness of life.

“Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Tonight we will glimpse the tenderness of Christ as Father washes the feet of some of our own. They sit in place of all of us. From there we will enter into the meal of the New Covenant making present that Passover meal, making His passion present before us. We will hear Jesus tell us to “take and eat” and so we will.

“Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Tonight is the beginning of the Sacred Triduum, the single event made of three days that we take part in every year. You will not hear the dismissal again until the end of Mass on Saturday night. In anticipation of His suffering and death, we will remove Jesus, the Bread of Life, from the safety of the Tabernacle. We will offer praise and thanksgiving for His total gift of Himself by song and in solemn procession. We are offered the opportunity to spend some time with Jesus, face to face tonight in Eucharistic adoration.

“Why is this night different from all other nights?” It is different because as we enter into these Holy Days WE will leave here... different than when we came in.