

Homily
Holy Thursday - C

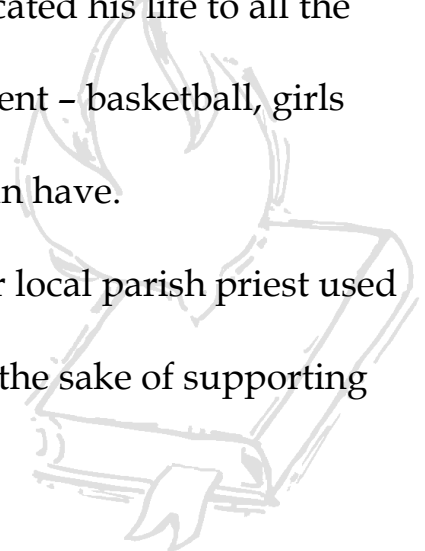
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 14, 2022

Ex 12: 1-8, 11-14
Ps 116: 12-13, 15-16, 17-18
1 Cor 11: 23-26
Jn 13: 1-15

One day can make a difference. At least this applies to me and hopefully to you as well. You end up learning that with one positive experience that presents the love of God in your life, you wish to continue experiencing this positive life through the people that support you and show you love.

In regard to my life as a priest, one of those days happened over forty years ago when I served as an altar boy at St. Paul's Church in Sandwich, Illinois. As a pre-teen, I was oblivious to the gravitas that the secular world often impresses upon all of us. Instead, the parish priest of this local Church named Fr. Thomas Kane dedicated his life to all the issues that were important to a junior high student - basketball, girls and the social life that only a twelve-year-old can have.

Through all this craziness in the mid-70s, our local parish priest used to invite the altar servers over to his rectory for the sake of supporting



us in the ministry we offered within the parish. I am not too sure Fr. Kane was extremely fond of kids – he was a gruff man who smoked like a chimney and had a very gruff disposition. That said, Fr. Kane was a wonderful, living example of sacrifice and suffering, someone whose example of faith modeled, in a smaller way, the sacrifices our Lord had to endure. For almost twenty years, Fr. Kane served our small parish community of three hundred families with the help of his sister and the nicest dalmatian I ever me.

Each year during Holy Week, we servers were called to the rectory in order to help with a parish mission and share some time together. In advance, each year Fr. Kane worked with our parents to hold a party for us servers and our families, a party where we were all invited to bring in food to share. For my part, I was in the throes of learning how to bake, so one year I brought a two-layer cake covered with what seemed like three inches of my proudly home-made frosting which would put you in a diabetic coma after one bite (as a kid, I always thought that the

cake was a waste of time and that the frosting was the best part of the cake).

Believe it or not, Fr. Kane all of us kids ATE that cake (and subsequently got sick because of all that frosting). After dinner, we enjoyed social time as a group that I still remember four decades later. My faith life built itself upon those one-night server get-togethers, which led to many other nights when Fr. Kane and I discussed the possibility of me becoming a priest. In regard to Fr. Kane, that one day made all the difference in the world concerning my vocation.

Unfortunately for me, I truly was oblivious to Fr. Kane's personal history, which for me makes this story that much more remarkable. After I graduated high school, my father confided to me that Fr. Kane had a difficult past, serving part of his priestly ministry as a military chaplain in the Korean War. During his tour of duty, Fr. Kane was taken as a Prisoner of War by the North Korean Army and what he had to endure in his time of imprisonment (which is not fit to mention publicly

in a homily) caused Fr. Kane to suffer greatly in his later years, both physically and mentally.

Yet, despite his own problems within the priesthood due to his trials and his own temptations of life as a result, Tom Kane saw something in me to encourage me to follow the path to ordained ministry and, eventually, to take his place as a priest. Fr. Kane realized that the Holy Spirit within the heart of a grace-filled priest transcended the individual sufferings any individual priest might endure.

As we return back to the Holy Thursday liturgy on *this day*, we once again enter that “one day” that makes all the difference in the world concerning our faith. Over these next twenty-four hours, we commemorate a Lord who was willing to feed us, wash our feet, suffer for us and die for us. We put aside the normal activities within our respective lives to remember that one day our Lord Jesus Christ gave us and realize how that hope he gave us becomes the lifeline and key to our own salvation.

During this one day, this God-man from heaven makes a difference not for just one man but for all of humanity, a humanity so desperately in need of being saved without even realizing their own perilous condition. In this one day, the sinful world becomes clean; in this one day, a sacrifice of life becomes a preservation of life. Not one other moment in time compares to the day that we begin to commemorate tonight and complete tomorrow with the fulfillment of this sacrifice on the cross. Not one moment in time can hold a candle to the three-day period which culminates in our Lord's resurrection and the hope of salvation dependent on this Christ rising from the dead.

In this year of the priest, the patron of parish priests throughout the world, St. John Vianney, summarizes the importance of what we are about to do tonight. St. John Vianney writes,

“What does Jesus Christ do in the Eucharist? It is God who, as our Savior, offers himself each day for us to his Father's justice. If you are in difficulties and sorrows, he will comfort and relieve you. If you are sick, he will either cure you or give you strength to suffer so as to merit Heaven. If the devil, the world, and the flesh are making war upon you, he will give you the weapons with which to fight, to resist, and to win victory. If you are poor, he will enrich you with all sorts of

riches for time and eternity. Let us open the door of his sacred and adorable Heart, and be wrapped about for an instant by the flames of his love, and we shall see what a God who loves us can do. O my God, who shall be able to comprehend?"

As we begin the three holiest days in the Church year tonight with this "one day," Christ prepares us for the Christian life, his own sacrifice and suffering, by emphasizing the gift of service in two very specific ways. Our gospel reading today focuses less on the Passover meal itself but instead rests on the value of placing our lives at the feet of others. This great God of ours shows us the path of salvation by washing our feet, by holding us in his warm, loving embrace, and by telling us that no matter what happens in our lives, no matter how bad things become for us, that God will always serve those who draw themselves close to Him. During our Eucharistic Prayer (whose preface will be used at most every Corpus Christi and First Communion liturgy throughout the world), we quote a passage from the twenty-second passage of Luke's gospel and the eleventh chapter of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (which we just heard at tonight's second reading) – we call

this text an “institution narrative” which reveals a different type of sacrifice at Mass. In these words, Jesus Christ offers us a sacrifice of his body and blood on this altar. Tomorrow we commemorate how our Lord fulfilled this sacrifice on the altar in his bloody sacrifice on the cross, a type of sacrifice which is understood as the greatest gift of service that humanity has ever been given.

I think to myself, as we celebrate this Holy Thursday liturgy, how Jesus must have felt as he was sharing his bread with his disciples. I think about a man who is about to die for our salvation, and in one of the last great acts of his life, Jesus decides to share a meal with his friends. He takes the bread, breaks it, and as he passes it to his friends, he thinks about the millions, billions, trillions of people that will partake of this supper in years to come. Jesus looks at all the faces of those who come to share in the meal and he finds great hope in such a feast.

And in this last act, he tells his disciples to offer this same meal to the people that they meet: “Do this in remembrance of me.” And so, on this night before he died, our Lord and Savior sends us the challenge to do

for others as Christ has done for us. Jesus sees the faces of all the people who are in need of being saved, all the faces of all the people who have gathered and will gather around the altar to celebrate this continuous sacrifice that we have celebrated for the last 2000 years. And when we share this meal in memory of the Lord, we see the face of our Lord within this changed bread to reveal the new yeast that allows this Passover bread to rise and grow in our hearts.

The focus of tonight's liturgy begins this sacred Triduum with these two specific examples of service which we are called to follow – to serve others and to feed others with this “Bread of Life” and the “Chalice of Eternal Salvation,” a type of service which dictates that we must focus on the salvation of others as a reflection of the salvation we desire for our own lives.

Thirty years ago at the conclusion of Vatican II, St. Pope Paul VI directed us all on what the gift of service means to our lives. He writes in his encyclical on Ecumenism:

Since this mission [of service] goes on and in the course of history

unfolds the mission of Christ Himself, who was sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, the Church, prompted by the Holy Spirit, must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death He came forth a victor by His resurrection. For thus did all the Apostles walk in hope, and by many trials and sufferings they filled up those things wanting to the Passion of Christ for His body which is the Church (cf. Col. 1:24).

Therefore, all children of the Church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world; they should foster in themselves a truly catholic spirit; they should spend their forces in the work of evangelization. And yet, let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spread of the Faith is this: to lead a profoundly Christian life. For their fervor in the service of God and their charity toward others will cause a new spiritual wind to blow for the whole Church, which will then appear as a sign lifted up among the nations (cf. Is. 11:12), “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14) and “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13).

After all Christ would have to endure, why would he endure this suffering? After all that Fr. Kane had to suffer as a priest in his life, relegated to a small parish ministry after all that he had to endure, why would he encourage me to be a priest? After what I have endured, which pales to what my former pastor suffered and infinitely less than our Lord’s Passion and Death on the cross, why continue on with what I am doing? The answer comes from those six English words given to us

in Luke's gospel and 1 Corinthians: *Do this in memory of me.*

Tonight, let us all remember the message of service that Christ offered his disciples on this Holy Passover Supper. Let us remember those, from the past and certainly in the present, who have modeled that life through sacrifice, suffering and many times in martyrdom for the faith. May we cherish the gift of service to others in our lives, whether it be at the dinner tables of our homes or at the hands of those who seek the love of God in our lives. May we be called, metaphorically, to wash the feet of every person that we meet, to sacrifice and suffer in the name of the Lord, as an example of how we live like Christians for the salvation of others. As the prayer attributed to St. Francis teaches us, "For it is in giving that we receive that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." Let us be called to that gift of service every day of our lives. This is our prayer.