



**Proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.**

**Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei**

How hard it is for us to separate ourselves from the things we value and cherish. And yet again, what is that we cherish and value? We should probably take a second look.

On Holy Thursday we celebrate Jesus' last supper with his disciples. They didn't know it was going to be their last meal with the Master. It was surely a happy start, their coming to Jerusalem for the annual feast of the Passover with a quick stop at Bethany at the house of Lazarus whom Jesus had brought back to life. At Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' home they have had a great meal and a pleasant surprise when Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, anointing him with fragrant devotion and humble service. But it wasn't just pleasant, it was also confusing: why not use the money for the poor? One needs to ask: Is giving away an expensive gift for the person you love a waste?

From there on to Jerusalem where the crowds shout "Hosanna, save us!" One might wonder how that salvation is going to happen. What are they expecting, a political leader? A military uprising and the overthrow of the Roman occupation? Freedom from heavy taxation and extreme economic misery?

Salvation for the Jews is not individual salvation but a community affair: it is the whole people that will be saved just as once God had liberated them from Egypt's slavery. Salvation for the Jews is not spiritualized either, and it is certainly not an empty promise. But just how is this truth telling<sup>1</sup> and incredibly famous healer going to bring it about? Is the heir of the shepherd king, David, going to restore Israel's ancient glory? All questions whispered under people's breath. Is Jesus expecting those questions? Are the disciples aware of them? Has the Jewish leadership got wind of a possible insurrection brewing?<sup>2</sup>

John reports that, after a few days spent in the Temple area, it's time to prepare for the Passover meal. And it is during that meal that Jesus, Lord and Master, makes an incredible and unexpected move: he kneels at each disciple's feet and with a basin, water, and towel washes and wipes their feet clean. With this symbolic gesture of genuine servitude, he drives home the concept that a true leader is a humble, honest, and vulnerable servant dedicated to the wellbeing of all, friends whom the leader considers above himself, whose lives he is ready to cherish, touch, and transform through a life lived in truth and integrity.

The disciples are not only celebrating the Passover. They are also experiencing its meaning as they are invited to eat the Passover Lamb, who now offers his blood and flesh in a sacrament that will remain with us until he comes again.

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<sup>1</sup> 12:44-50

<sup>2</sup> John 11:55-57; 12:9-10.19;



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Taking, blessing, breaking, and giving are the verbs that describe the core of the eucharistic actions, the communion bread and the wine of salvation shared with us. Salvation from the powers of evil and oppression that keep us enslaved in ignorance, separated from one another, in fear, in hatred, and in mistrust of each other, is procured through that sacrificial gift and the willingness of letting go of one's self-importance and self-centeredness, addictions of body and mind, scapegoating and defense mechanism, anxiety and guilt, need for control and attachment to one own way. It's the ultimate freedom that allows us to abandon ourselves in God's hands.

The first Passover signaled the liberation of the Hebrews from the Egyptian slavery. Episcopal priest, Fr. Matthew Fox, draws a parallel with that ancient Passover. A new "liberation is intrinsic to the Last Supper story. An escape from Pharaohs of all stripes, from oppression of all kinds, whether inner or outer." But that liberation did not come free of charge. He goes on to remind us that "[a] tragic price was paid, that of Jesus's crucifixion at the hands of the Roman empire, which seemed to have triumphed by killing him in a most cruel and public manner."<sup>3</sup>

Writing to the young church in Corinth, the apostle Paul goes over the mystery of faith with them. He seems to say: Don't you understand? When we commune, [we] "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." To him, the eucharist is not merely a remembrance, a celebration, or even an experience. We, the believers, take a more evangelical and active stance: we *proclaim* his death, we *glory* in the cross, we *participate* in his life by partaking of Jesus' flesh and blood.

This, Paul reminds us, is a meal for all, where all are welcome, where there is no wall of separation among people, no discrimination of economic status or educational background, no favorites of gender, no judgment of lifestyle, no exclusion due to mental or physical traits, and, certainly, no hatred based on skin color.<sup>4</sup>

The Corinthians were not coming together properly to celebrate the Eucharist. Paul, as a disappointed father, tells them he is ashamed. Professor John Laurence states it plainly "To celebrate it (Eucharist) in a context of selfishness and division is to violate its very nature, to reject Christ who at the Last Supper and in his death shared himself completely. Such a violation results in condemnation rather than blessing."<sup>5</sup>

Approaching the altar with questionable intentions, with pockets of unresolved hatred of self and contempt for others, renders us unworthy to receive Jesus' body and blood and does not create communion. At the communion table, all partake of the body and blood of Christ and all, at the same time, give of themselves as communion for others and for the world. In that dying to self

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dailymeditationswithmatthewfox.org/2021/03/27/passover-2021/>

<sup>4</sup> How do these divisions compare with the ones mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-33?

<sup>5</sup> Laurance, John D., S.J., ED. Introduction to Theology, p. 72.



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and arising to the new Body, the cross is exalted, and the Lord's death is proclaimed. Such a selfless proclamation is, then, carried out into the world as the foundation to the new Creation, the second coming of Christ. This is what we proclaim.

The Eucharist is central to the life of the Church and the highlight of the worshipping community. In our confession, we acknowledge how unworthy we are to receive the Blessed Sacrament by the ways we have walked away from God and one another and ask God to forgive us and fill us with God's grace. During the worship service, we ask for the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they ask the same of us. We pray for those who suffer, for peace in the world, and for wisdom to care for the environment.

Paul is trying to tell the Corinthians that we are in this race together and is beneficial and necessary that we help each other as a family.

May we kneel at each other's feet, as Mary Magdalene taught Jesus and Jesus passed on to his disciples as a honest and well-meaning sign of service and humility. Amen.