

HOLY THURSDAY

We shed the tears that Judas did not want to

ECCLESIA

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"And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Lk 22:14-15).

Today, Jesus speaks these same words to us. It is He who calling and gathering us together. It is Jesus who is now celebrating the Mass. It is Jesus who is now guiding the

faithful assembled and is leading them towards a new life: the life of Charity, the life of God, the life we all seek!

But how should we celebrate Mass so that it is really an encounter with Christ?

How should we participate in the Eucharist? Only Christ can teach us, because it is He who is our teacher: let us look up to Him and listen!

Jesus shows us that God is humble.

In the Upper Room before celebrating the First Mass in history and to the amazement of all, Jesus gets up from the table and, like a servant, starts washing the apostles' feet.

Peter voices scandalous words when saying to Jesus, "You shall never wash my feet!" (Jn 13:8).

Peter says what we all think: we do not want a humble God. But God is humble nonetheless. We do not want a God who puts himself last, but God does so anyway. We do not want a God without pride, but He really has none at all!

Will we be able to convert and follow God? Will we be able to destroy idols built by our own hands and replace them with the true and humble God deep within our hearts, the God who makes himself the servant of all men?

At the Eucharistic celebration, we return to this very question and it is God who awaits our response: a response of actions, gestures and decisions. Let us sincerely recognize that pride is the poison of human history from all time. It is pride that had divided human family. It is pride that has triggered wars. It is pride that has made so many people weep and has extinguished the joy that God had given man on the day of Creation!

So may we be humble. Let's come down from our pedestals and be kind and meek. The Mass demands this conversion of us so to be a Eucharist celebrated with Christ. Jesus shows us that God is infinitely merciful.

At the Last Supper Jesus removed the veil that hid Judas' betrayal. Today, He removes the veil of hypocrisy hiding our own betrayals. In fact, we all have a little Judas in our hearts: we are his brothers!

But how does Jesus respond to this?

After saying these things [the teachings on humility after the washing of the apostles' feet], Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, so Simon Peter

motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." (Jn 13:21-27).

Jesus shows us what betrayal feels like...but with the hope of forgiveness. He casts a beam of light into Judas' darkness so that Judas can see and feel its shock. And the morsel of bread Jesus offered is a subtle gesture: it is a sign, an invitation to Judas, with his hand extended, to accept His total mercy.

Judas, unfortunately, did not want to be forgiven: we know this sad story well! Pride was Judas's ultimate downfall. However, for Jesus, Judas is still the long-awaited friend and lost son the Father's heart. Indeed, no man's wickedness. can ever discourage God's desire to offer forgiveness.

What about us? At Mass do we believe we are receiving Communion from a merciful God? Are we a community that likewise is always ready to generously offer forgiveness? Whoever does not forgive does not know God. Whoever does not forgive has rejected God. He has rejected God who offers forgiveness. May what John the Evangelist wrote in his first letter happen for us today: "We have believed in the love God has for us!" With such faith may we repeat the divine act of washing others' feet.

Jesus shows us that God is poor.

Jesus, the Son of the living God, chose a stable in Bethlehem to come dwell among us. He said of himself: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Lk 9:58). At the Last Supper, he chose bread and wine, signs of poverty, and transformed them into His wondrous Presence!

God is comfortable only in poverty, because God cannot have possessions. God, in fact, is a gift of himself. He gives everything He has, and so he is poor, infinitely and truly poor. God's poverty is an inevitable consequence of His Love: true love is a gift of one's self. He who gives, keeps not any possessions

And us? Do we hear the invitation to poverty that comes from the Eucharist? Do we know how to read the sign that Jesus has placed in our hands? "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will

give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." (Jn 6:27).

This is a blessed time to hear the Word of Jesus! May today's Mass truly be, for all of us, a communion with the God whom Christ has made known to us: the humble God, the merciful God, the poor God!

Without conversion, we will never come to know our God.

*** *Cardinal***