

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Holy Thursday, April 9, 2020, Cycle A

The Apostle Paul tells us that as often as we eat this bread of the Eucharist and drink this cup of the Eucharist we “proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” We need to ponder what St. Paul tells us, for while it is true we proclaim the death of Jesus every time we gather around the Lord’s table, we celebrate a death that is much more than the personal death of the Lord Jesus. We march into the celebration of this great Easter Triduum proclaiming, “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ – why!? For through Jesus’ cross comes our salvation, our life, our resurrection!

And Jesus’ cross is our cross. Jesus says: Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. The cross is the message of the Transfiguration of Jesus we celebrate on the Second Sunday of Lent. Peter, James, and John all wanted to remain on the mountain of Transfiguration, but Jesus challenges them, and us, that we must go back down into the cross of human life. We cannot enjoy the fruits of Resurrection if we try to escape the cross of living every day human life.

Jesus’ cross, Jesus’ death, Jesus’ resurrection! Our cross, our death, our resurrection. We and Jesus are interchangeable – this is our faith! He is the head, we are His body. We believe that Jesus calls us forth as His body in the world. As His body, we are Jesus, and Jesus is us. When we celebrate the Eucharist then, we also proclaim our own deaths for the sake of our own resurrection. Dying to ourselves is what Jesus calls us to do with Him that we might share the joy of His resurrection.

As the Apostle Paul says “Jesus took bread and said this is my body, and he took a cup of wine and said this is my blood,” and he said: “Do this in remembrance of me!” Do what in remembrance of me? Do the cross in memory of me! In John’s Last Supper scene, Jesus gets down on his hands and knees and shows us in a very concrete way just what he means by “do this in memory of me.” By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus shows us what he means when He calls us to take up our cross and walk in His footsteps. What does it mean to die to ourselves for the sake of others? Dying to ourselves means washing the feet of those who need to have their feet washed – serving those who are in need in any way!

And Jesus comes to Simon Peter; but good ol’ Peter wasn’t going to have any part in Jesus’ newfangled idea about dying to ourselves for the sake of others! “You will never wash my feet,” Peter tells Jesus. And Jesus answers Peter: “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.” In other words Peter: unless you buy into my worldview that we must serve the needs of each other, you will not share in the New Life of my Kingdom. Peter, our Passover from death to life is not accomplished by our trying to save our life, but by giving up our life for others! “For whoever wishes to save her life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Which means at this time of the coronavirus suffering we stretch out arms of compassion, patience and cooperation – cooperation in observing the restrictions set down, no matter how inconvenient it may be to us, so that others might live. This is not time, if there ever was, to think only of ourselves. We have the superb example of so many people laying their lives on the line that others may live, our medical and health personnel, first responders such as police, firefighters, EMTs and ambulance personnel, the people who work in our food stores, farmers who put the food on our tables, pharmacy and drugstore personnel. Following their example, we too should heed the call of Jesus to wash the feet of others, so others may live.

Every time we eat this bread that becomes the body of the Lord, and every time we drink this cup that has become the Blood of the Lord – we are identifying ourselves with Christ and accept His call to wash each other’s feet. For unless we live lives of washing each other’s feet, then we will have no share in eternal life. “What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do.”