

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 21st 2011

EASTER TRIDUM - HOLY THURSDAY

First Reading: Exodus 12. 1-8, 11-14

Nine plagues had failed to move Pharaoh. Before carrying out the tenth, God gives instructions for the institution of the Passover, details of which are set out in the reading. There are three elements in this ancient rite, the sacrifice of a victim, a celebration at night and protection afforded by shed blood. The Passover became an annual event in the religious life of the Jews.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 115. 12-13, 15-18

This is one of the great Hallel (Hebrew: praise) or Egyptian Hallel Psalms (113- 118, see in the numeration of the Jerusalem Bible) traditionally sung while the Passover lambs were being slain and possibly sung by Our Lord and the disciples after the Last supper. In the portion before us, the psalmist thanks God for some great deliverance. The cup of salvation suggests the pouring of a drink offering. Vows made during distress will be paid in the sight of all.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11. 23- 26

As none of the Gospel existed when Paul wrote his letters, this account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper is the first ever set down. Later Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded their versions. Paul tells the Corinthians in the context of public worship that this account was given by direct inspiration and was not drawn from documentary sources. He writes because there were disorders in the Corinthian Church due to party spirit and originating also from failure to appreciate the solemn nature of the occasion, by misuse of the "agape" or love feast.

Gospel: John 13. 1-15

From this point in the narrative Our Lord's teaching is directed to his disciples. The present occasion shows how much, even at this late hours, they were in need of instruction. Common courtesy required a servant to wash the feet of guests who had come off the dusty ways of the village. None of the disciples was willing to undertake this menial task and so Our Lord, to teach them a lesson in humility and service, performs the task himself.

The disciples had been arguing over who would hold the leading positions in the government Jesus was about to set up (cf. Lk 22. 24; Mk 10. 35-45; esp. V. 41). The discussion was heated. They were caught up in the ambition for position and power and authority. He had so little time left for them to learn that the way to glory is through service and not through position and authority. It was that led Jesus to wash the disciples' feet and to demonstrate what true loyalty is: serving others.

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