

The Bread of Life and the Call to Serve

Tonight, as we begin the Holy Triduum, we enter the "Upper Room" of our own lives. The liturgy of Holy Thursday is a beautiful, complex tapestry woven from three golden threads: the Sacrifice of the Passover, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Service of the Priesthood. These three are inseparable. To understand one, you must embrace the others. In our first reading from Exodus, we hear the specific instructions for the Passover meal. The Israelites were told to eat in haste, with their sandals on and staffs in hand. It was a meal of transition—from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land.

I can relate to this feeling of being in "transition" and looking for sustenance. I grew up the youngest of six children in a family that had been Catholic for generations, yet we struggled deeply with poverty. In my village, education stopped at the 8th grade. My family had no money to send me to a boarding school. When my pastor asked if I wanted to go to the seminary, my "yes" was not born of deep theology. I didn't even know what a seminary was. I said yes because I knew that in the seminary, I would receive three meals a day. Like the Israelites, I was hungry, and I was looking for a way out of my "Egypt" of poverty. I followed the physical bread, not realizing that the Lord was using my physical hunger to lead me toward a spiritual hunger that only He could satisfy.

In the second reading, St. Paul gives us the earliest written account of the Institution of the Eucharist. He reminds us that "on the night he was handed over," Jesus took bread, broke it, and said, "This is my body that is for you." There was a time in my life when I tried to walk away from this gift. In the year 2000, after my college studies, I left the seminary without telling anyone. I found a job where I earned 5000 rupees a month—a great sum at that time. I had the "bread" of the world. I had money, status, and comfort. Yet, at night, I could not sleep. Something was disturbing my soul. I realized then that "man does not live by bread alone."

When I tried to return, the path was blocked by my own failures. My Bishop initially told me to leave his office. It took a year of persistence and a miraculous change of heart for him to forgive me and send me to the major seminary. Even then, as I approached the Diaconate, I felt the weight of fear. It took a terrible accident—a moment where I literally cried out to the Lord for my life—to make me realize that my life was not my own. I promised the Lord: "Leave me, and I will be your priest."

Today, when I stand at the altar and repeat the words of St. Paul, "This is my body," I am overwhelmed. The boy who went to the seminary just to get a meal is now the man through whom Christ gives His own Body and Blood to the world. The Eucharist is not just a ritual; it is the living presence of a God who never gives up on us.

Finally, in the Gospel of John, we see the "Institution of the Priesthood" through a surprising act: Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. He tells them, "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." The Priesthood and the Eucharist cannot be divided. The Priest is the servant of the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is the source of the Priest's strength to serve. It is the Lord who brought me from my small village to the Diocese of La Crosse. I did not choose this path; He paved it through my poverty, my wandering, and even my accidents.

My dear brothers and sisters, and especially you, the children and young men of our parish: Do not be afraid to offer your lives to God. My family has been Catholic for a century, yet I was the "lost one" who found his way back through God's grace. I encourage the parents here: pray for vocations within your home. If your son feels a tug toward the priesthood, do not worry about his "success" in the eyes of the world. The world can give a salary, but only Christ can give a calling. To be a priest is to be a bridge between heaven and earth, sharing the Body and Blood of Jesus so that no one ever has to be spiritually hungry again. As we wash feet tonight and celebrate this Mass, let us remember that we are all called to serve, fed by the one Bread that truly satisfies.