

2021 Holy Thursday

1. Take yourself back to last Monday, when the provincial health authority revoked the permission to gather inside the church for worship. We had to cancel all our preparations for these coming days of the Sacred Triduum. **We were so disappointed. We made new plans. The greatness of the Eucharist consists not in our planning but in what precedes our planning and that we become servants of this plan.**¹

2. Jesus too followed an ancient plan at the Last Supper. It was the Passover ritual of Israel. Through the experience of their first Passover, in Egypt, as slaves of the Egyptians and in bondage to Pharaoh, the tribes of Israel emerged as one priestly people, ransomed and freed to worship God. **What mattered most was that Israel remained servants of that plan in order to remain free.** She had to listen and obey Moses. "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations **you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever.**'" (Ex 12:1,14).

3. In the desert, Israel learned to offer herself to God. God taught her how to worship him by sacrifice. Her greatest temptation and failure was idolatry. All idolatry is a kind of self-worship. Who decides who the godhead is? You do! She emerged from the "fundamental law of egotism, self-assertion, self-sufficiency"² - her rebellion - to worship God. The first generation struggled with this new identity. The second generation grasped it better. **This plan of**

God given by Moses and Aaron still unites and shapes the identity of true Israelites all over the world.

4. Jesus, the Servant and Son of God, knew this plan from the lips of Joseph and Mary who took him to Jerusalem every year. **But he also knew the definitive plan of his Father:** "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:23-24) It was a plan that preceded Israel, and was hidden in the heart of the Father. The first plan was given through the servant of God Moses, the second plan was given by the Only Begotten Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. The first plan was directed to giving Israel a new identity, the second plan directed to giving the whole human race the heart of the Son. **What matters now is that we become and remain servants of this new and everlasting plan.**

5. Like Israel, we cannot enter this plan by ourselves. The new Moses must lead us into the Red Sea, to wash us in his baptism, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." (Jn 13:8) We must allow Jesus to train us in this new identity, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:14) **True worship is going out of myself to worship God present in the other.** But it doesn't stop there. The Eucharist is the greatest event and plan of all times because it alone can take us into God and make us capable of giving as God gives. "For God himself is not a self-enclosed Ego but rather, is real only in the mutual self-giving of the Father, Son and Spirit. **The Eucharist**

¹Joseph Ratzinger - Pope Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017), 86.

² Ibid, 89.

trains us to give like the Son, giving and receiving from the Father. We practise this on each other: “Love one another as I have loved you in the Eucharist!”

6. It is hard work to allow ourselves each day to be taken out of ourselves and fitted into the whole Body of Christ in ways that we do not wish. This is the kind of community that the Eucharist creates among us, within us: **constant giving and receiving in freedom and reverence.** The community of the Eucharist can be our desert or our promised land depending upon how well we have learned from Jesus to sacrifice ourselves.

Sacrifice in the plan of God has the purpose of unity because it trains us to value everyone not in terms of what each can do but in terms of how much Jesus suffered for each person. **And this is where the priesthood also emerges from the Eucharist.** The priest is a man who has become a servant of the misery of humanity that divides and fragments the human family. Like the fragments of the wheat held together by the bread, **he gathers all into a unity in the One Body.**

Fr. Giuseppe Baldo (1843-1915) beatified in 1989 was such a man of the Eucharist. Somewhat self-consciously, but boldly, “From the first day of his presence in the parish in presenting himself to the people he proposed his program in these terms: “I am your parish priest. Yours: therefore everything for you. From now on you have a new property, a new heart, to which you have the right to appeal; **a new soul, which for absolute duty will have to suffer for you,** for you to agonize. Young people: are you looking for a friend? Here it is: I have always lived with young people and I have learned to value their qualities of intelligence and heart. Old, poor, sick: you are the

first that I carry in my heart. Sinners; believe me and accept everything for you. For you in the daytime; for you at night. The most beautiful day will be the one in which I may have given God a soul. . . I raise my hands and before the Tabernacle, before the Angels, the patron saints of this church, before all of you, witnesses to my words, I swear – I swear and promise that I shall seek nothing more than the salvation of souls.”³

Let us ask for this grace to imitate Jesus in his giving, that we may become his Eucharistic People, a thankful people. It’s the Father’s plan for us.

³ John Paul II, Homily of Beatification of Giuseppe Baldo, 31 Oct 1989 in *L’Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, 20 Nov 1989 (no. 1116), 7.