

The Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday & Easter Vigil

This evening we enter the Sacred Triduum, the three days in which we celebrate the mysteries that shape our lives as Christians. We walk with Jesus into his death and resurrection—not merely through reenacting his deeds but finding ourselves and our world in the unfolding of his love through darkness and pain. Love that is revealed in his Cross. Love that still reaches out to us.

Darkness and pain are so present to us this year in the global pandemic that surrounds us and that has left so many hearts broken in fear and anguish. Our church is empty, a symbol of what many are experiencing in this difficult moment. Yet we are filled with hope in the presence of God who, as St. Augustine reminds us, “is closer to us than we are to ourselves.” We are especially mindful of you, our parishioners and friends of St. Augustine’s, and we want you to know of our prayers and closeness to you during these holy days which hold the promise of Christ’s Easter joy and peace.

Holy Thursday

*I have given you a model to follow...
As I have done for you, you also should do.
John 13:15*

The liturgy of Holy Thursday has us gathered around meals: We are rooted in the Passover meal eaten by the Jewish people celebrating their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. We join the Evening of the Lord’s Supper when Jesus, knowing that his hour had come, and he was to be handed over, still gathered with his disciples to share a meal. In the middle of fear, human failure and betrayal, Jesus still chose to love. St. Paul reminds us of the gift of himself Jesus gave to us in the eucharist as he took bread and said, “This is my Body given for you,” and took the cup, saying “This is the new covenant in my blood.”

John’s Gospel which we hear tonight doesn’t have these words at the meal. Instead, he focuses on Jesus washing the feet of his disciples to explain the meaning of the Eucharist. Jesus washes his disciples—and us—with a depth of love that helps us to see how he would give his life for all on the cross. His dramatic gesture comes with a question and a command: “Do you realize what I have done for you? If I have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.” As he has “loved us to the end,” we are to do as Jesus has done for us.

Because of “social distancing,” we won’t be washing anyone’s feet in the liturgy this Holy Thursday. (Our focus is “handwashing” this year!) But the real “washing of feet” is to be happening elsewhere anyway. It happens in our care for the elderly of our community who may be alone and afraid; in reaching out to families under stress and sickness where possible; in caring patiently for children at home during these quarantined times; in sharing food or gift cards with the needy. In our simple kindness and gestures (like phone calls)

which show care and hope during these unsettling times. Our medical/rescue personnel—doctors, nurses and aides—show us what it means—at great risk—to “wash feet” in their dedicated care for us all during this pandemic. A prayerful reflection for this evening might be: *How can I encounter people in my life who are in need and not turn away?* We are nourished in a eucharistic meal of emptying, self-giving love. On this holy night, may we also be so moved to live this anew: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

--**Fr. Jim Paradis, O.S.A.**