

***Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Christ the King Sunday)
The Last Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)
November 21, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #45)***

“He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.’” (Luke 11:1)

As we conclude our Eucharistic Mission, I would like to reflect upon our understanding of the Eucharist as both a meal and a sacrifice. Our thoughts, this day, turn towards the question of the un-named disciple found in the Gospel of Luke (11:1) which is quoted above. Our understanding of the Eucharist, as meal and sacrifice, must begin with our understanding of Prayer.

If we were asked to define prayer, many would rightly respond saying: “Prayer is speaking with God.” It may be further defined through an examination of the various types of prayer we are most familiar with. These types will include: petition, praise, contemplation, thanksgiving, etc. However, for us to move toward an understanding of the Eucharist, I would like to redefine prayer using one word – Revelation. Prayer begins with a Divine Revelation. We understand this Divine Revelation as a Divine Communication; a Word which is first spoken. In the Genesis story of creation, we read of the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Of all the various named punishments inflicted upon them and, likewise us, is the un-named “Clouding or Darkening of our Intellect through Sin.” May I suggest this punishment to be the one we struggle with so often. Due to my/our sinfulness, I/We are not always able to comprehend God’s Divine Will in our daily lives. We may find ourselves questioning: why God would allow certain things, what is His Will for my life, does He even care about me or those I love, or how will my choices affect my life, the lives of those around me, and, in both the material and spiritual realms, how will my actions affect the lives of those who have gone before me or will come after me. We are faced with many questions and our darkened intellect offers us few answers.

In his First Letter found in the New Testament, Saint John uses three profound words – God Is Love (1 John 4:16). Yes, God is love. He is a Love which cannot allow us, His beloved children, to remain lost in the darkness; groping aimlessly seeking the light of His Face. God must be the one who comes to find us. To accomplish this task of re-establishing the union between Himself and His children, God will opt to gradually reveal Himself to mankind. As we have read and reflected upon so far this year, God chooses to begin this Divine Communication of Self-Revelation by calling to Himself a

chosen people – Israel. Our Jewish ancestors, so tenderly loved, will become the recipients and means for this Love to be spoken to mankind.

In the Old Testament, as you recall, God began this process by leading His chosen people to reject the various “false gods” of the different nations. Their response to His movement also had to be a gradual process. They had to gradually come to see Him as solely worthy of heartfelt worship. This process would find its apex in the offering of sacrifices within the Temple of Jerusalem. Various types of animal and grain sacrifices would be offered to God in the Temple throughout its existence. The sacrifices would only halt for periods of time; when Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of a pagan culture. Yet, once freed from these oppressors, they would resume with greater fervor than before. We know they were still offering sacrifices even during the time of Jesus in the New Testament. Ultimately, they would finally come to an end with the destruction of the Temple at the hands of the Roman army around 70 AD.

In the midst of this terrible event, the infant Christian Church had already begun to teach that Jewish Temple worship, its feasts and sacrifices, found new meaning in the death of Jesus of Nazareth. They believed that Jesus was truly the Spoken Word of God found from the beginning of creation in the Book of Genesis. They taught that Jesus had revealed a new means of Divine Communication through His free offering of Himself on Calvary. This sacrifice, they held, contained the most important aspects of a sacrifice directed to God. Jesus was the Lamb of Sacrifice; harkening back to the Passover in Egypt. He was also the High Priest who offered the sacrifice; beginning at the Passover meal (Last Supper) and concluding upon the altar of the Cross. The Eucharist, the Thanksgiving, would be tied to this sacrificial event. Yet, it could never, and should never, be seen as separated from the communal meal they celebrated together.

In recent times, it seems that we have stressed the community meal aspect of the Mass trying to connect it to the Last Supper event. This attempt fails for the Last Supper was a Jewish event remembering the Passover. Early Christians proclaimed the sacrifice of Jesus developed out of the Passover meal. It was different, for it was a new revelation. And as a new revelation, it opened the door to a new form of Divine Communication. It is the act of Eucharistic sacrifice which gives meaning to the communal meal. For the early Christian community recalled the words of Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me,” expressing a oneness with the sacrifice expressed by one meal where He would become present under the appearances (accidents) of bread and wine shared together by one family. This would have been a connecting point to the Jewish understanding of sacrifice and meal; which they would have been accustomed to from growing up in Jewish Temple worship. For the Eucharist truly is a Thanksgiving for the Thanksgiving which allows mankind to once again become united in communion with God and each other.