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Holy Thursday 2019

If I asked you who the first priest was, who would you say? Jesus? Melchizedek? How about Adam? Adam is the first priest of a different sort, of a cosmic priesthood. God built himself a temple, the universe, and like any good temple, a image of God was there: Adam. Then he is given care of the temple to Adam, to keep the Garden in harmony. They walked together in harmony. This is, of course, what life was supposed to be like, where everything we do is worship and communion with God---this is the reference to “my sacrifice and yours”---the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of your life. But with sin, we needed another sacrifice. None of us have perfectly clean hearts. We cannot make our lives a perfect offering, apart from grace. So God gives us this new worship, and entrusts it to his priests, that all of us, a priestly people, might offer fitting worship and once again unite all of our lives’ actions to this worship. To give us this, he laid down his life freely out of love for us.

And this is why we cannot pray just on our own. We must be united to this sacrifice at least some of the time that all of our actions might be united to it all of the time. And this is why it cannot be just a symbol or just a memory. We must truly be united with Christ.

We opened today with, “O God, who have called us to participate in this most sacred Supper, in which your Only Begotten Son, when about to hand himself over to death, entrusted to the Church a sacrifice new for all eternity, the banquet of his love, grant we pray, that we may draw from so great a mystery, the fullness of charity and of life.”

That means that when we unite ourselves to this worship, we must let it transform us. If we celebrate the banquet of his love, we must draw from that a life that is full of charity, one that is transformed. One that lays down its life for others. The priest will pray later at Mass tonight, “As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and, as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us, we are washed clean.”

The sacrament of charity, one of the names of the Eucharist, is not just supposed to transform our lives that we avoid sin. No, in fact, it is supposed to transform our lives to serve. When Christ called us to extend mercy to others, we so often think that that means forgiving those who have wronged us. We sell mercy short, for mercy is tender-hearted compassion. It is *chesed*. It is a loving covenant obligation. It is grace. It is kindness. It is favor. It is even reproach at great evil. It is so complex that no single English word captures it.

But we know how to live it:

feed the hungry

shelter the homeless

clothe the naked

visit the sick and imprisoned

bury the dead

give alms to the poor

- To instruct the **ignorant**;
- To counsel the **doubtful**;
- To **admonish sinners**;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences willingly;
- To comfort the afflicted;
- To **pray** for the living and the **dead**.

This is mercy. This is how we are to live transformed by the Eucharist. The sending forth at the end of Mass, “Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life” instructs us. Having become what we have eaten, we must live the love that we are. This is the gift of the Eucharist to us. This is the sacrament of charity. No mere symbol, but the Body and Blood of our Lord, crucified, died, and risen, give up, out of love, for you.