

# Reflections

Father Nicolas Schwizer

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## Holy Thursday: Old and New Covenant

As all the Jewish families did, Jesus also gathered with his disciples to celebrate Passover and to share the Passover meal. They commemorated the liberation of the Hebrew people from their captivity in Egypt.

In these rites, the head of the family recalled the most important events in the history of the People of God. It was like a solemn renewal of the Old Covenant between God and his people.

It is this Jewish Passover which Jesus desires to eat with his disciples. But this is transformed this evening, the Eve of the Passion on the Lord. The Lamb of the Passover this night will be Jesus himself who offers himself to his disciples as nourishment and will soon give his life on the Cross.

With this, a New Covenant begins: a new People will seal a New Covenant with God. It is what St. Paul reminds us: *“This chalice is the New Covenant sealed with my blood.”*

Holy Thursday is the beginning of the sacraments of the New Covenant. During the meal, Jesus institutes the Eucharist and the Priesthood. But there is something more: on the morning of Holy Thursday, in the Cathedral of each diocese, the Chrism Mass is celebrated where the Bishop consecrates the holy oils which will serve throughout the year for the different sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Priestly and Episcopal Ordination, Anointing of the sick.

But the nucleus of all sacramental life in the Church is the Eucharist where the gestures and words of Jesus are repeated when He instituted it, on the eve of his death. The Passover of the New and Eternal Covenant is celebrated in each Mass.

There is only one victim, Christ who offers himself on the Cross even if there are countless Masses. There is only one priest, Jesus Christ, even if there are men who are priests of the Church around the altar.

The Eucharist is par excellence the **Sacrament of unity**. Therefore, the Lord asks us today this question: how do we live unity with our brothers and sisters? If our heart is pure, but closed to others, what does it matter?

Our heart must be open to brothers and sisters according to the measure in which the Bread of unity enters. And the same Eucharist commits us to create unity among the brothers and sisters: when I leave Mass, I have to take this Eucharistic unity to my home, my work, my neighborhood, my parish, my political party, to all my brothers and sisters.

The Eucharist is also the **Sacrament of Love**. Jesus himself shows us how He understands that. In a gesture of humility and serving love, He washes the feet of the disciples. In that way, He reveals to us that to be God is to SERVE: He shows us a God who – because He loves – serves those He loves; because He loves, He gives himself with a sincere heart to all who seek Him: *“If I have washed your feet, you should also wash the feet of one another. I have given you an example so that what I have done with you, you should also do.”*

Today more than ever, all of us Christians should see our life as a great and permanent service to the brothers and sisters who are in need, to the brother and sister who depends on our love. And we know that to serve generously and unselfishly is not easy because it goes against our selfishness (self-love), with our eagerness to dominate, to exploit them.

The Blessed Virgin understood her life that way. In the hour of the Annunciation, She proclaims herself the handmaid of the Lord. It is because She knows that the vocation to be the Mother of God demands that She becomes the first servant of God and of mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist – instituted on the first Holy Thursday – is the sacrament of unity and of serving love. Therefore, let us ask the Lord to give us that spirit and that He makes us transmit it to all our brothers and sisters. Only in this way will we together be able to build a new homeland, more Christian, more fraternal, more solidary.

Original Spanish: Translation: Carlos Cantú, Schoenstatt Family Federation, La Feria, Texas USA 02132018 cantu\_carlos@hotmail.com