

## **Holy Thursday + 2 April 2026 + Ex 12:1-8, 11-14 + I Cor 11:23-26 + Jn 13:1-15**

Tonight, we enter into the “Sacred Paschal Triduum”, where *the Church celebrates the greatest mysteries of our redemption (Missale Romanum)*. While every liturgical action of the Church is “holy”—that is, set apart from the ordinary to be made fit for worship of God—the *Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Friday of the Passion of the Lord, and the Saturday Easter Vigil in the Holy Night* constitute one great liturgy that just happens to be separated spatially by three days. On this holy night, we call to the present the giving of the New Covenant Passover in the Holy Eucharist, the ordination of the first New Covenant priests, and the universal call of all Christians to Christ-like charity.

Our Gospel tonight begins with this one breathtaking declaration: *Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father (NAB)*. *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (RSV)*. I’d like to look at this a little more closely. First, we can say that Jesus *knew* everything that laid before Him. And He was free, He could have said ‘*no, these people don’t deserve what I’m about to do!*’, and He’d be absolutely right. But He keeps going.

Next, *His ‘hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.’* 17 times in John’s Gospel we hear of the ‘hour of Jesus.’ In the early days of His ministry, we only hear that His ‘hour has not come.’ But now it has come. And the meaning of this ‘hour’ is revealed: it is Christ’s final, true ‘passing over,’ with all of its cosmic consequences. Hopefully, our liturgies and mediations over the next 3 days will make these ‘consequences’ abundantly clear.

And then, *‘having loved His own where were in the world.’* Who are these, ‘His own in the world’? This Gospel marks the beginning of Jesus’ Last Supper, so it is safe to assume John is referring here to at least the 12 disciples. And the crazy thing is, based on what Jesus does next, it is clear that His ‘love to the end’ even includes love for Judas. More on that in a moment. But first, let’s consider this *‘love to the end’*—what does this mean? Well, it means there wasn’t anything more Jesus could have done in His loving. The Greek word for “*end*” here does not mean a conclusion at a point in time, as if Jesus is now going to stop loving them, or that His love will end with His upcoming death. Rather, it means the “*completion,*” the “*consummation,*” or “*perfection.*” It uses the same root word in Greek that we hear Jesus use when He cries out from the cross, “*it is finished!*” (Jn 19:30). It is perfect!

I could never adequately put to words all that Jesus means here. It is simply beyond human comprehension. But in a feeble attempt, we can say that now, at this hour, which begins with the Last Supper and is completed with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, ‘it has been completed, it has been consummated. “It” being the Father’s perfect plan, which has been achieved through the perfect obedience of the Son. But this “plan” is not just an “idea,” but perfect love, love for “His own in the world.”

But as we will see, this love is not just for the 12. As we said, Jesus was perfectly aware of the violence and human death that lay before Him. Yet His response is to rise from supper, take off His outer garments, and wash all the disciples' feet—even Judas'—His betrayer! We ritually reenact this event each year on Holy Thursday, not because the Mass is a pageant, but to help convey to our hearts perhaps just the smallest realization of how shocking Jesus' actions are here. That God-in-the-flesh, the Almighty Maker of the universe, the judge of the living and dead, washes His disciples' feet: the 12 who never really understood His teachings, who slept during His agony in the garden, and who ran off when He was arrested under false charges. One of them denied even knowing Him, another betrayed Him. No wonder Simon Peter protests to this! They don't deserve Jesus' love, but He still *chooses* to love them, to the end!

This ultimate act of humility can be seen as a summary in miniature of not only all that Jesus *did* while on earth—all of His loving actions—but even more, who He truly *is*, for as John will write later on in his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter: *God is love*. Again I think the purpose of Jesus washing of the disciples' feet is to help us begin to comprehend the love of Christ shared at every moment of His life thus far in His ministry of service. But this is so that we can begin to comprehend a much harder reality, an infinitely deeper act of love: the love of Christ as manifested on the Cross. We'll reflect more on this tomorrow.

Finally, Jesus concludes: *If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet*. In other words: 'make my love known through your love for one another!' Not, 'earn this love,' because that is impossible. Not, 'let others see how nice you are.' No, 'make my love known.' Because in the end, it's not about us. It's about His love, in us. The truth is that we are also the ones *in the world* that He has *loved to the end*. In the prologue of John's Gospel, John already gives a hint of what it means to be "Jesus' own in the world" when he says, [Jesus] *came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name... (cf. Jn 1:11-12)* To *accept Him* and to *believe in Him* is to be totally His 'own:' to be God's own beloved children.

Yes, Jesus died for all people. He has loved all people to the end. But tragically, not all will accept Him. And I say tragically, because to refuse to accept Him is to refuse to accept the most basic, universal, and deepest desire: perfect love. Love that is not just a feeling, but as we will see over the next few days, true love: love that is sacrifice, being-completely-known, and finally, abundant and eternal life. That is why Jesus gives us who *believe in His name* the command to wash each other's feet: to make His love known. After He washes the disciples' feet, Jesus begins His "Passover": His "passing-over to the Father" starting with the Eucharist, where He gives them His body and blood; an act fulfilled on the Cross, His most shocking self-gift of *love to the end*.