

**HOLY THURSDAY – April 1, 2010**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

With tonight's celebration of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we begin the Sacred Triduum—Latin for “three days”, the most holy three days of the entire Church year during which we recall the events that bring about our reconciliation with God and our hope for eternal life. Our faith is founded on the death of Jesus Christ, his gift of the Eucharist which enables us to participate in that saving death, and his rising from the dead. The Triduum is all about these most important mysteries.

We begin with this solemn commemoration of the Last Supper—Jesus giving us the Eucharist (of which Paul speaks in the second reading), the priesthood in order to continue the celebration of the Eucharist throughout the world and throughout history, and his command of loving service to others as illustrated by Jesus washing his apostles' feet. In reflecting on this last item, Pope Benedict has given us an insight that is truly profound; he said: “God doesn't want to trample on us, but kneels down before us so as to exalt us.” God kneeling down to us—is that not an amazing image! Yet how very true it is; in fact, so much of our Christian faith is all about the infinite, all-powerful God who in his Son humbled himself radically so as to come to us since we could not on our own power or initiative come to him.

Consider the many ways this has been done. One week ago today, on March 25, we celebrated the feast of the Annunciation when Mary consented to God's plan for her to conceive and give birth to Jesus. The Son of God, co-eternal with the Father before time began, entered into this world of ours and took on our flesh-and-blood earthly condition; that is the Christian meaning of the word ‘incarnation’. God the son knelt down before us by taking on our human nature. Think of how startled you would be if a leader of a powerful nation or some world-famous celebrity would give up that high status and wealth in order to serve the poor and live in poverty and obscurity himself. And then realize that God the Son did infinitely more than that by taking on our frail human condition while not giving up his divinity. Indeed, as the Holy Father said, “God kneels down before us so as to exalt us.” Is that not utterly amazing?

And that divine condescension did not end at the Incarnation. In so many ways Jesus ‘knelt down’ before the human race in his public life and ministry of service; remember all the miracles and other good deeds he did for so many people. But at the Last Supper Jesus ‘knelt down’, he abased himself to the apostles and to us in some most remarkable ways:

1. Think of the amazing gift that the Eucharist is. It wasn't enough that Jesus took on our human frailty for our sake; he went even further and gave us the Eucharist. He lowers himself, kneels down ever more before us by making it possible for bread and wine to become his Body and Blood so we could receive Jesus himself into our bodies, ourselves. The sacrifice he would make of himself on the Cross the next day is made available and present to us in every Eucharist, at every Mass.

2. And because Jesus wanted this gift of the Eucharist to be made present throughout the world and in history, he also instituted the priesthood during the Last Supper by telling the apostles “do this in remembrance of me.” The priesthood is all about carrying on the work of Jesus to help lead his people to holiness and to generous and loving service to others. In this Year of the Priest, proclaimed last year by Pope Benedict, I am truly grateful for the prayer you have offered for us priest before our Masses—believe me, we need and truly depend on your prayers and on the prayers of all God's people. This year has not been about putting us priests on any pedestal, but rather praising Jesus who has chosen to work even through us frail and sinful creatures. How amazing it is!

3. Jesus then gave the apostles the true meaning of this priesthood he gave them—it is to be lived in loving service to his brothers and sisters. In the gospel St. John tells us that Jesus took a basin of water and began to wash the feet of his apostles—a humble and very practical act of kindness, in which he

literally knelt before them so as to exalt them (in Pope Benedict's words). And isn't it interesting to hear St. Peter's reaction: "you shall never wash my feet." Peter was scandalized that Jesus would lower himself to this extent; he thought it was beneath Jesus' dignity. Only after Jesus told him "then you will have no share in my kingdom" did Peter relent. Jesus performed this act of humble service for them, he knelt before them, in order to give them an example of how they were to serve others. If Jesus, the divine teacher, master and Savior, could lower himself in this way, how can we dare not to follow his example?

"God doesn't want to trample on us, but kneels down before us so as to exalt us." These words from our Holy Father capture so powerfully and poignantly the mysteries of our redemption that we recall this Holy Week and especially tonight as we remember what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper. As we continue our journey with Jesus in these last hours of his earthly life, may we offer him our grateful praise as we kneel down before him in humble adoration.