

**HOLY THURSDAY – 2011**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

With this Mass of the Lord's Supper, we have once again entered into the Sacred Triduum—the “three days’ made uniquely holy by the Church’s commemoration of the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Given the cold and snowy weather we have had in the past few days, it almost seems like we are preparing for Christmas in late December rather than for Easter in late April. And in fact, it is not too much of a stretch to draw a direct connection between Christmas and the mysteries involved in this Holy Week. We always look forward to giving and receiving gifts at Christmas; the greatest gift, of course, is Jesus himself—the Son of God born of a woman in Bethlehem. That baby grew up to be the man who would proclaim the kingdom of God and who would willingly submit to humiliation, torture, and an agonizing death on the Cross in order to accomplish our redemption.

Jesus is all about a divine generosity to the human race, a giving of himself that began at Bethlehem and that in fact continues even in our own time. The primary way that Jesus gives himself to us is through the sacraments he instituted. At the Chrism Mass two days ago, Archbishop Hanus spoke about how the sacraments carry on the tangible presence of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God that became flesh and dwelled among us. The archbishop then blessed the oils to be used in celebrating the sacraments throughout the archdiocese in the coming year—baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick and ordination. The oils presented at the beginning of this Mass came from that Chrism Mass and will be used during the next twelve months here at St. Edward.

On this Holy Thursday night, we are invited to remember with special gratitude the gifts Jesus gave us at the Last Supper. The Eucharist is the fundamental and extraordinary gift of Jesus himself—the gift of his Body and Blood under the outward appearance of bread and wine. St. Paul in the second reading reminds us of what seems utterly impossible—that mere bread and wine, regular stuff from the earth, could actually become Jesus’ Body and Blood. But the fact that it seems inexplicable to us does not really matter, does it? Just as the angel Gabriel told Mary at the Annunciation, so we believe now: “Nothing is impossible for God.”

St Paul also reminds us how Jesus provided for that Eucharistic gift of himself to be given to others and throughout history. After instituting the Eucharist at the Last Supper, he then told the apostles: “Do this in remembrance of me”—words that the priest repeats in every Mass after consecrating the bread and wine into Christ’s Body and Blood. Thus, the sacrament of the priesthood—ordination—finds its origin at the Last Supper as well. The priesthood is all about continuing and handing on the gifts of Jesus and the gift of Jesus himself.

And in case the apostles would ever be tempted to think of this new priesthood as a way to glorify themselves, Jesus taught them at the Last Supper itself that their priesthood was all about service and not about themselves. St. John tells us in the gospel that Jesus washed the feet of the apostles—and had to overcome Peter’s initial reluctance to do so. This humble act epitomized and illustrated how the apostles were to act as priests—in imitating the humble example of their Master. And just in case the apostles still did not catch on, Jesus made it even more clear in saying: “if I...the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” Here the gift takes on the aspect of challenge as well—a challenge the apostles, those first priests of the new covenant, would live up to when they began their work after Pentecost. At the Chrism Mass and before the archbishop blessed the new sacramental oils, he asked us priests to renew our commitment to the priestly service of Christ, his Church and his people. We did so with gratitude, conscious of our need for and our total reliance on the grace of God and on our prayers for us.

How utterly amazing is the unlimited generosity of God our Father and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! God has given us the gift of his Son, and the Son continues to shower us with his gifts of grace, strength, truth and love—especially through the sacraments. And through these sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we receive the gift—the ongoing and ever-renewed gift—of Jesus Christ himself. He truly is the gift that keeps on giving. God grant us the grace to live in gratitude for these gifts and to generously and joyfully bring the gift of Christ to others as he would have us do.