

The Four Questions: A Holy Thursday Dialogue

Question 1: Tell us, why is this night different from all other nights?

Response: At the Passover Seder Meal, the people of Israel are instructed concerning the Passover like this: "In every generation people must so regard themselves as having been in Egypt, for it is written, 'And you shall tell your children in your day saying, "It is because of what the Lord did for us that we came out of Egypt.'" Therefore we are bound to give thanks and praise to God. The Most High God brought the people out of bondage to freedom, delivered them from mourning to a festive day, led them from darkness to a great light, and saved them from slavery for redemption.

We who are followers of Christ know that, as God rescued Israel from the slavery of Egypt through Moses, likewise God redeemed us from our slavery to sin through Jesus Christ. By his passion, death, and resurrection, Christ has passed from this world to the Most High God, showing us the way and preparing a place for us. And so, the Church keeps this solemn feast of Passover in its celebration of Triduum (' tri-ju-wum) – the three days before Easter.

Question 2: Tell us, why on this night do we recall Jesus' act of humility in the washing of the feet?

Response: At the Seder Meal, it is customary for all to wash their hands while praying, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who sanctified us with your commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of hands." Scripture tells us, however, that Jesus washed not only hands, but also feet.

The Gospel of John tells us, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." In this act of loving kindness that preceded his total self-giving on the cross, Jesus knelt before his disciples saying, "If I do not wash you, you have no heritage in me." Your spiritual life with me will not be confirmed in an attitude of servanthood.

Question 3: Tell us, why on this night especially do we share in the eating of unleavened bread?

Response: At the Seder Meal, Israel recalls the Passover instruction, "When Pharaoh let Israel go from Egypt, they were forced to flee in great haste. They did not have time to bake bread, they could not wait for the dough to rise. So, the sun beating down on the dough as they carried it along, baked it into flat unleavened bread." Thus, the unleavened bread helps us remember our ancestors in the faith and how they fled Egypt in haste.

On this night we remember that, before Jesus distributed the bread to the disciples at their Seder Meal, he added these words to the blessing of the bread: "This is my body." The bread that symbolizes Israel's hasty flight to freedom also shows us our unity in Christ, for St. Paul tells us, "The fact that there is only one bread means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all share in this one bread."

Question 4: Tell us, why on this night especially do we all share from the cup?

Response: The Passover Seder Meal begins and ends with the drinking of wine. The leader of the Seder blesses the wine with a prayer of thanksgiving, saying, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine." The Gospel of Luke relates Jesus' actions at the Last Supper, "At the end of the meal he took the cup and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you. Do this in memory of me.'"

The Church, then, remembers this night, the night of the new Passover, in which Jesus began his saving work, "Dying he destroyed our death, rising, he restored our life." Let us enter into these words and actions, these rites and scriptures, with hearts and minds open to discover anew the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our salvation, our life and resurrection; through whom we are saved and made free."

adapted from Liturgy website sponsored by Collaborative Ministries Office of Creighton University.