



Holy Thursday

While all of Holy Week is very special, Holy Thursday is my most favorite. While the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper commemorates the institution of the Eucharist and we observe the incredible symbolism of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, it is the solemn adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that follows the Mass that brings so much joy and meaning to me.

I liken the after Mass adoration hours to the hours on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane. "Then after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives... to a place called Gethsemane" (Mt 26:30, 36). When I was in the Holy Land last year, we saw a relief sculpture on

an outside wall near the Cenacle area where the Last Supper was held. In the artwork, Jesus and the disciples were holding torches and walking across the Kidron Valley toward Gethsemane. We retraced those steps, walking along the same path across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane. Jesus told the disciples to stay with him while he prayed, to keep watch and pray; but they fell asleep. "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:40-41).

I recall as a youngster the solemn adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was held all through the night of Holy Thursday until the morning of Good Friday. (Over the years, the hours of solemn observance were changed so as not to go past midnight.) In my home parish, St. Patrick's in Onalaska, we had the custom of having altar servers take shifts through the night. I had always signed up for hours in the middle of the night – like at 2 or 3:00 in the morning. I'd get up and ride my bike to church in the stillness of the night, slip in the side entryway, vest in the servers' garb, and take my place at the altar of reservation that had been so beautifully decorated by the parish sisters. I would silently read the passion accounts over and over imagining what may have been going on at such and such a time – the betrayal and arrest in the garden, Jesus before Pilate, Peter's denial, etc. It was so still and quiet in the church at that hour; perhaps I would be alone or with only one or two others. But I never felt alone or afraid. I was literally in the presence of the Lord – and I was determined to stay awake, to keep watch and pray.

I continue the practice of keeping the vigil hours of solemn adoration on Holy Thursday evening. However, my focus and meditation has changed. In particular, I contemplate the Washing of Feet. In that moment of simple servanthood, Jesus demonstrated for us a total call to service, "If I your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, how much more should you wash each other's feet" (cf. Jn 13:14). Paraphrasing a meditation by Bishop Morneau, Jesus challenges us who are with him at the Eucharistic table and who stay awake with him watching and praying; to accept the call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and tend to those who need a healing touch. Our Holy Thursday celebration has the power to transform our lives!