

The following prayer vigil is a beautiful way to spend time in personal prayer, or as a family, on this night. Though we may not be able to adore the Holy Eucharist in church, as we would have expected, we know that adoration is, first and foremost, an interior act, whereby we show God the reverence and worship that is his due. We adore him tonight “in Spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24), confident that he is present to us, hears our prayers, and answers our love and longing for the Holy Eucharist.

ADORATION VIGIL FOR HOLY THURSDAY NIGHT

_____ Sr. Maria Frassati Jakupcak, O.P. _____

On the night of the first Holy Thursday, Jesus enjoyed his last moments of earthly peace during a walk from the Upper Room to the garden of Gethsemane. We take this walk with Jesus at the end of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, processing to the altar prepared for the faithful to keep watch with the Blessed Sacrament. In memory of the night Our Lord spent in Gethsemane, this altar is often decorated to look like a garden. There is a lovely custom of visiting these “gardens” in seven different churches on Holy Thursday evening. In places where this is possible it is a beautiful way to pray and walk with Our Lord. Even if we can’t make such a journey, however, we can keep vigil with Jesus this night and consider why he chose to spend Holy Thursday evening in a garden.

▪ FIRST VIGIL ▪

The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. **Gn 2:15**

The heavens belong to the LORD, but he has given the earth to the children of Adam. **Ps 115:16**

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. **Jn 15:9**

Meditation

During the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples, *As the Father loves me, so I also love you.* These words are astonishing. *As?* The love between the Father and the Son is infinite, perfect, and eternal. Jesus loves us so? With a love that great? This seems too good to be true.

The garden of Eden, with its overflowing abundance, was meant to be an image of the seemingly impossible beauty and fruitfulness of the love God has for us. God’s plans for us are always ordered toward our happiness and always complete. And so in Eden, in the midst of his original plan for humanity, nothing was wanting, everything was perfect.

Everything, that is, except the choice of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lost Eden not because of a lack on God’s part, but because of a lack on their own part. God

provided everything, took care of everything, but the one thing he asked for in return—trust—Adam and Eve did not give. They failed to trust in the greatness of the Father’s love and this failure led them to disobedience.

When Jesus went to a garden to begin his Passion, he went as the new Adam. In Gethsemane, he gave the Father the loving obedience that Adam and Eve should have given in Eden but did not. Unlike the first Adam, Jesus responded perfectly to the Father’s love. He left nothing wanting. He did not falter. He understood that obedience would involve great suffering, but his love for the Father knew no bounds. It is this boundless love that Jesus came to Gethsemane to offer the Father, and it is this same love he offers us.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, it is not always easy for me to trust in the goodness of the Father’s plans for me. By the merits of your unshakable obedience to the Father during your agony in the garden of Gethsemane, give me the grace to trust, even when it is difficult. Amen.

▪SECOND VIGIL▪

The man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. The LORD God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you? **Gn 3:8-9**

*I was caught by the cords of death;
the snares of Sheol had seized me;
I felt agony and dread.*

Ps 116:3

Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Jn 17:24

Meditation

After their sin Adam and Eve were filled with shame. They were still in Eden, but because of their disobedience the earthly paradise became for them a place of anguish, sorrow, and distress. Rather than bring their shame to God, the only source of healing, they tried to hide from him. The very trees of the garden became walls our first parents put between themselves and God. Shame can often make us want to hide from God as well. But God wants no barriers between himself and us. He longs for us to come to him for forgiveness and mercy.

Jesus loves us too much to allow us to cut ourselves off from him. Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane as a sign that he is seeking, not just Adam and Eve, but all of us. He seeks the shame of all of the sins since that original offense. He loves us, he wants to be with us, and if we will not allow ourselves to be where he is, he will come to be where we are. He will stop at nothing. Our sin, our shame, our wounds: none of that is an obstacle to God. In fact, wherever

we are most hurt, there we are most in need of his presence, and that is where he wants to be.

Jesus seeks out the dark corners where we hide, but he does not seek to condemn us. He seeks to save. This desire to free us from sin leads Jesus to the agony in the garden, even to the sweating of blood, and to his death on the cross. His suffering does not take away our suffering in this life, but it ensures that when we suffer we know that we are not alone. He enters into our difficulties so that we can more readily ask for his mercy and healing where we need it the most.

Prayer

Good and gentle Jesus, I am so grateful for your closeness to me, especially in my times of suffering. When I am tempted to hide myself from you, please seek me out, conquer my shame, and make me aware of your loving presence. Amen.

▪THIRD VIGIL▪

The LORD God therefore banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken.

He expelled the man, stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the garden of Eden, to guard the way to the tree of life. **Gn 3:23-24**

*How can I repay the LORD
for all the great good done for me?
I will raise the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.*

Ps 116:12-13

Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?

Jn 18:11

Meditation

Both Matthew and Mark mention that Jesus and his friends sang “a hymn” immediately before leaving for the Mount of Olives (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). We know, historically, that this hymn must have been some part of Psalms 113–118, the psalms that Jews traditionally sing at Passover. These psalms sing of the goodness of God, especially as he worked in the history of Israel.

Psalm 116 is particularly striking when read in the light of Holy Thursday. The Psalmist sings of *the cup of salvation* he will take up in order to thank the Lord for his goodness. During his agony in the garden, Jesus specifically speaks of his Father’s will as a *cup*. His suffering, the cross he will take up tomorrow, is the cup that Jesus raises to the Father. But it is also the cup that he raised at the table of the Last Supper earlier this evening. The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass are one and the same. The cup Jesus raises to the Father contains his very self.

In Eden after the fall, mankind was cut off from the tree of life. Jesus chose to begin his re-creation of the world in a garden not just to act as the new Adam,

nor simply to be with us in our shame. Jesus goes to the garden because he, himself, is the fruit on the tree of life. Formerly we were cut off from this fruit but now, because of the cup Jesus lovingly offers to the Father, the tree of life is available to all who seek it.

On this night when Jesus gives us the greatest gift he could possibly give, the gift of himself in the Holy Eucharist, let us be grateful for this fruit. Let us give ourselves to him, raising our lives, with his, to the Father.

Prayer

Merciful Jesus, no words of mine can thank you enough for the gift of your presence in the Holy Eucharist. Teach me to live my gratitude. Give me the grace to take up whatever cup the Father offers me today so that my life becomes an offering acceptable to him. Amen.

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