

Holy Thursday – 2026

Exodus 24:3-11

Hebrews 9:11-22

Matthew 26:17-30

His blood is spectacular. Divine life is in the blood of God's Son. His blood is holy. His blood is a cleansing agent. His blood atones for sin. Christ's blood is spectacular.

How else would a Savior pay? How else might a Messiah lay claim to humanity? How else might fallen man receive the forgiveness of sins? You are flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14-18). Created by our Father, your design is from above. Your physiology, your union of body and soul, your intellect and your emotions and your capacity for higher things – justice, altruism, mercy, courage – God created you to fully experience life, and so you do. Blood is essential. Blood transports oxygen, nutrients, and hormones. Blood acts as a protective agent against infection. Blood coagulates to prevent loss. Blood maintains a stable environment within the body, regulating temperature, pH balance, and connecting all parts of the body. I wonder why God created blood to do all those things. In the book of Leviticus, God addresses blood head-on. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the life” (Leviticus 17:11). Atonement: sin must be paid for. God is just. The Law must be fulfilled. Blood, life is the payment. God then prohibited His people Israel from consuming blood in any way. God was preparing His people for a reversal, an astounding reversal, a well-planned reversal. The reversal would be revealed in the Upper Room.

It is one of the most emotion-laden statements in all of Scripture and it comes from the mouth of Christ. “With great desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Do you sense the passion in Jesus' words? He saw this moment from afar and longed for it. He's in the Upper Room. His disciples are gathered around Him, and they are commemorating Israel's great deliverance from a land of slavery and death (Passover – Israel's escape from Egypt). But Jesus sees more. The past is being fulfilled. The future is opening up. Suffering is at hand. And this meal is what He has desired. “With great desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Jesus' enemies have cut their bonds to God's Word and have conspired to kill God's Son. The Lord knows that His time, the hour for which He was sent, has come (John 13:1). As soon as He leaves the Upper Room, He will be subject to great shame, great injustice, great suffering. Judas has already betrayed the Lord Christ. Caiaphas has stirred the religious rulers into a feeding frenzy. Satan salivates at snapping his jaws on the Messianic King. Darkness is enveloping Jerusalem. And our Lord's desire is this meal, this sacred meal, with His disciples before He suffers. Why?

St. John, as He recounts the night in which our Lord was betrayed, begins his passion narrative this way: “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” (John 13:1). And then John recounts how the Son of God washed His disciples' feet. It was love. It was Divine Service. It was self-giving, a window into Jesus' perpetual ministry. Love. God's love created humanity. God's love redeems humanity. God's love sanctifies humanity. Love pulls you from the ash heap of your sin. Love washes you in the

blood of the crucified, making you holy. Love engenders in you the greatest thing that you have ever known – a new love in you, a crucified and resurrected love, an eternal and uplifting and ennobling love. Christ gives. He longed for that last Passover because He wanted to give precisely what the meal embodied.

How often have you come to this altar feeling lost, or alone or having your heart breaking because of grief? How often have you felt that there is no place more important for you to be than at Christ's altar receiving His gifts, His holiness, His grace? Our lives are riddled with failure. We fail to keep God's commands. We fail to love others as Christ has first loved us. We fail to pick up our crosses and follow Him. God awakens in us a repentant heart and it hurts. To fail the One who so loved us, to bring pain into the lives of those we genuinely regard – it hurts. And our Good Shepherd beckons us to this meal. "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Love prepared this meal. Love serves this meal. The Lord Christ calms your heart with His body and blood. The Lord Christ floods your spirit with forgiveness in the sacrament of the altar. He invigorates your faith and sends you out as His agent, His disciple to love those whom you encounter. At this altar you receive a true communion with Christ, intimate and genuine. That's why your heart longs for this meal.

"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-29). What our Lord accomplished on the cross He gives to you in His body and blood. Not everyone is persuaded by His words. Not everyone submits to the declaration of Christ. It's impossible, they say. It's unnatural, they say. "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" they say (John 6:60). "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). Do you hear the implicit ridicule in the words "this man"? That tone was taken when Jesus forgave the paralytic. "This man is blaspheming" (Matthew 9:3). That tone was taken when Jesus was challenged by the chief priests: "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). That tone was taken after Jesus cast out demons. "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons" (Matthew 12:24).

What do you say? About this Man, I mean, what do you say? Is anything impossible with God? The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, this is Immanuel – God with us (Isaiah 7:14). True God and True Man in one person, Jesus' flesh *is* the flesh of God. The attributes of His divinity have been communicated to His humanity. My flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink (John 6:55). Jesus said that. Is there any doubt as to why our Lord would give you His body to eat and His blood to drink? He is a giving God. With great desire have I desired to die for you (Hebrews 12:2). With great desire have I desired to wash you in my blood (Revelation 7:14). With great desire have I desired to forgive you all of your sins (Luke 23:34). With great desire have I desired to feed you with the bread of life (John 6:51). The vine feeds the branch (John 15:4). The fruit of His sacrifice is in you. The bounty of His life is in you. His death and resurrection are in you. Take, eat, this is my body, given for you. Take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you.

Left to our own devices, we could not love as He loves. God is at work in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). The fruit of Christ is yours. He gives; you receive. Your life is enlarged by virtue of your communion with Him. That is why the Lord Christ earnestly desired to eat the Passover with His disciples – He was building His church. He was sharing His life. Love and grace and heaven are in His body and blood. He gives it to you this night. His sacrifice becomes tangible, present, a gift of remarkable beauty. Receive it now and follow Him to Calvary. Follow Him to His cross.