

Holy Thursday (ABC)
April 2, 2026
“Bread and Towels”

Our Lord and the Apostles at the Last Supper are a study in contrasts. Both were reaching out for something, and both were modeling something.

The Apostles were partakers of Passover. They came to eat and celebrate. At the feast commemorating Israel’s liberation from Egyptian slavery, Peter, James, John, Matthew, Simon, and the others reached out for lamb, herbs, bread, and wine. These things fed the body and reminded them of the power of a liberating God. The Apostles filled themselves at the Last Supper.

Jesus, on the other hand, did something else. He reached out for a towel in order to serve. John tells us Jesus rose, removed his garments, tied a towel around his waist, and washed the Apostles’ feet. This was an act of a charity and a prophetic sign, as he told Peter, “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.” Jesus washed them to sanctify and purify them.

In this act, Our Lord demonstrates the virtue of charity. Charity has many qualities. Charity, or love is *knowing*. It knows our neighbor’s needs and seeks to meet them. We cannot love what we do not know, so knowledge assists us in serving others.

Charity, or love is *humble*. To be humble is not to lie. I am not humble if I, as a 6-foot man, say, “I am short.” Humility is to recognize truth, things as they are. The truth is that we are blessed but broken, sanctified but sinful, holy but helpless without God. The humble Master put the Apostles first.

Charity or love is *cleansing*. Jesus washed the Apostles’ feet with water, and later he would pour out water from his side on Calvary to wash each of us in baptism. Charity makes the filthy clean again.

Finally, charity is *obedient*. God’s greatest commandment is to love him and our neighbor. In caring for the poor, sick, and needy among us, we obey this divine command, and save our souls.

We all need models, and one model for our imitation tonight is Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe. Maximilian Kolbe was one of the martyrs of Auschwitz in World War II. Born in January 1894 in Poland, he joined the Franciscans at age 13, studied in Rome, and was ordained a priest devoted to Mary Immaculate.

He worked to spread devotion to Our Lady in Japan and India. His pockets were full of miraculous medals to be distributed, and he published good Catholic literature, including a monthly magazine called "The Knight of the Immaculate." In Japan, guided by our Lady, he built a monastery on the outskirts of Nagasaki, which was one of the few places undamaged when the atomic bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945. Our Lady always knows what's best for us.

Maximilian Kolbe returned to Poland as the Second World War began. Arrested for assisting Jewish and Christian refugees, he was sent to Auschwitz, where he endured harsh labor and frequent beatings. He spoke to other prisoners of God's love and often stepped aside so others could eat at meal time.

One day, a prisoner escaped camp, and Nazi officers condemned ten men to die in retaliation. When a man cried out about his wife and children, Kolbe stepped forward and took the man's place. He and nine other men were then sent to a pit and slowly starved to death. Would you have been willing to do this? Would I?

As they died, Kolbe spoke of our Blessed Mother and even sang hymns. After two weeks, he was given a lethal injection and his body burned to ashes. He died on the vigil of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, August 14, 1941.

Thus was fulfilled a prophecy his mother later recounted. When Maximilian was ten, he had a vision of Our Lady holding out two crowns to him. Mary asked which he wanted, "The white crown of purity or the red crown of martyrdom." He replied, "Both." This Franciscan priest was a point of light in a world of darkness.

On this Holy Thursday, guided by the example of this saint of Auschwitz, may we demonstrate love that is knowing, humble, cleansing, and obedient. Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, pray for us.

God bless you.