

Holy Thursday

Tomorrow is March 25. The last time Good Friday fell on March 25 was 11 years ago. But it won't happen again until the year 2157 - that's 141 years from now. Normally on March 25 we celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the day that the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary to tell her that she would become the mother of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is the day we celebrate the conception of Jesus in the virginal womb of Mary. Exactly nine months later we celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. This year the Catholic Church puts off the celebration of the Annunciation until the Monday after the Octave of Easter, April 4. Jesus will be 10 days premature on December 25th this year.

We do not know the precise dates for the birth and the death of Jesus. There is a tradition that truly great people die on their birthday, a sign of the completeness of their life. William Shakespeare, for example, did it. So did Rafael Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Ingrid Bergman, and Joe Tinker, who started the famous double play combination for the Chicago Cubs: Tinker to Evers to Chance. A theory developed that a really great person died not on his birthday, but on the anniversary of the day he was conceived. Perhaps someone thought that Passover in the year that Jesus died came in early spring, and that the original Good Friday was March 25th. We don't know this for sure, but that may be why the Solemnity of the Annunciation was assigned to the same day, in order to show the greatness of Jesus, linking his death with the date of his conception. That would also explain why the day for Christmas became December 25th.

In the year 1608, when Good Friday fell on March 25th, the transcendentalist poet John Donne wrote about it. He included these lines about the two events: "All this, and all between, this day hath shown, Th'abridgement of Christ's story, which makes one – As in plain maps, the furthest west is east – Of th'angel's *Ave*, and *Consummatum est*." Donne says if you look at a flat world map, the farthest point west is the farthest point east. It's all one. He says that on this one day, you see the whole story of Jesus. The angel says, "Hail, Mary," and Jesus says, "It is finished." On that day "Christ came and went away." It's all one.

The same can be said every year of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. We start Holy Thursday with a hymn about the cross because what we are about to experience is a sacramental participation in the cross of Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus happened on Good Friday, but Jesus anticipated his death on the first Holy Thursday, when he told his disciples, "This is my body.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Tonight and at every mass we participate in the sacrifice of Jesus. Every mass is one with Calvary.

Receiving communion comforts us because of the closeness we feel with Christ. However, mass brings us the discomfort of joining Christ in sacrifice. This is not just the altar of Christ's sacrifice, it is the altar of our sacrifice too. At every mass, but especially tonight, let us place our sacrifices here. The patience you show your family, the gifts you make to charity, the time you give to teach, your humility when someone you love is wrong, let us place it all here. As the life of Christ is one from his conception to his death, as the eucharist and the crucifixion are one, so in this sacrifice let us be one with Christ.