

## Holy Thursday: Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Cycle C, 4.18.19  
 Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14/  
 1 Corinthians 11:23-26/John 13:1-15

### A STORY WE HAVE TO TELL

This night and these holy days that follow are a time for story-telling. It's the art of story-telling that makes us unique among all God's creation. Mr. Mayer Kirshenblatt grew up in a small village in Poland just before World War II. He emigrated to Toronto in 1934 – before many of his family were lost in the Holocaust. After he married and had a family of his own, Mayer would tell wonderful stories of Jewish life in his small Polish town before the war. His daughter especially delighted in her father's stories. Inspired by her father, she went on to earn her doctorate in Jewish studies. After he retired, he got very bored, so at 73 years of age, he stumbled into an art class at the local Jewish center. Encouraged by his wife and daughter, Mayer began to paint scenes of his life's story: the house where he grew up, the people he knew, the town's synagogue, village scenes, marketplace and surrounding countryside, street performers and the day the circus came to town.



His daughter collected his stories and paintings and published them in a beautiful book – *They Call Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust.*

Mayer wrote: *God has blessed me with a wonderful memory. I consider myself a storehouse of memories. The way I paint is important, of course, but the most important thing is to get a subject. I have to get a subject. I think about it. I remember. It just comes to me. The subjects I decide to paint are those that have a story to tell.*



As we enter the Triduum, these sacred three days of Holy Week that culminate in our Easter celebration, we have a story to tell. And tell it we must, lest it be lost, because it's a story that our world needs to hear. It recounts a history that needs to be made real again... each day... in our lives... and in the life of every person. It's a story of hope and healing, a tale of love and mercy, a reenactment of humble service and generous sacrifice. Last Thursday before the Chrism Mass at the Oakland Cathedral the clergy of the diocese gathered to hear a presentation by a visiting bishop, George Murry, the bishop of Youngstown, Ohio. He talked about our Catholic faith and how we pass it on to the youngest generations. He focused on the newest generation, Generation Z – those born between the mid-1990's and 2015. The oldest members of Generation Z are now entering or beginning college. The statistics he shared were shocking and a real wake-up call to the religious professionals – the priests in attendance.

The bishop cited a study by the Barna Research Group whose surveys indicate that more than any other generation before them, Gen Z does not claim a religious identity. They might be drawn to things spiritual, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations, many of whom received a basic education on the Bible and Christianity. And it shows: The percentage of Generation Z that identifies as atheist is *double* that of the U.S. adult population. When asked about the barriers to having faith, these young non-believers said the problem of evil and suffering is a deal breaker for them – *How could a good God allow so much evil and suffering in the world?* More than a third believe it's not possible to know for sure if God is real. For many in the Z Generation truth is relative at best, altogether unknowable at worst.



Personal achievement, whether educational or professional, and hobbies and pastimes are the things most central to Gen Z's identity. Finishing school, starting a career and becoming financially independent are the top three concerns on their list. Caring for the poor and needy is second from the bottom. Even family as being important to their sense of self ranks behind personal achievement.

There is a tendency to be either overly romantic or critical about new generations. The reality is that members of Generation Z face the same life challenges as every generation before them, but in a super-connected and rapid-moving technological age. They have the same deep needs for love, significance, meaning, and belonging as every previous generation. So, what story can we, as followers of Jesus and members of the Church, tell them that will be convincing and inviting. They are young and impressionable. They are fiercely independent and globally focused. Can the message of Jesus' universal love for all people, regardless of rank or gender, orientation or status find an echo in their hearts and reinforce their experience and love of diversity? Can the boldness of Jesus in challenging both the political and religious systems and hierarchies of his day speak to their distrust of institutions? Can the authenticity of Jesus and his impatience in proclaiming the Kingdom of God reverberate with their sense of realism, their ability to multi-task and their orientation to the future? Can Jesus' parables filled with captivating images speak to a generation that prefers images to words? uses snapchat and video-messaging rather than email and text messages?



On the other hand, what part of our Christian story that we tell tonight and for the rest of the Triduum can be a challenge

to them and invite them to widen their horizon? that there is more joy in giving than in receiving? that pain is a real and inevitable part of life and can be a pathway to compassion for others who suffer? that a life lived in the service of others may not seem outwardly glamorous but is more fulfilling than a lucrative job or career? that unless we connect with one another beyond an iPhone screen, as Jesus did in washing his disciples' feet, and unless we give of our very lives, as Jesus did in the Eucharist, we'll only be bystanders of this adventure called life? observers and consumers instead of participants in this amazing life that God has entrusted to us?



As Mayer's family will always remember their father and their ancestry in Poland in his paintings, we – the descendants of Jesus – remember him in bread: blessed, broken and shared. In the bread and wine of the Eucharist, in our imitating his simple but eloquent act of washing the feet of our brothers and sisters, we become the story we remember. Our memory of Jesus at this table as he instructed is not just a faded photograph in an album or a painting in a catalogue, not a photo texted into the cloud, but a living reality – the Christ of the gospels alive among us in our love for one another and for all. The Risen One continues to walk among us. This night challenges us to make the memory of Jesus' healing and humble love for each generation live again in our

own acts of healing, forgiveness and compassionate generosity.

May we become the story that the next generation can see and hear.

*Be careful how you live.  
You may be the only Bible  
Generation Z ever reads.*

*John Kasper, OSFS*

