

Holy Thursday - Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Reading 1

[Ex 12:1-8, 11-14](#)

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,
"This month shall stand at the head of your calendar;
you shall reckon it the first month of the year.
Tell the whole community of Israel:
On the tenth of this month every one of your families
must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.
If a family is too small for a whole lamb,
it shall join the nearest household in procuring one
and shall share in the lamb
in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it.
The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish.
You may take it from either the sheep or the goats.
You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,
and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present,
it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.
They shall take some of its blood
and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel
of every house in which they partake of the lamb.
That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh
with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

"This is how you are to eat it:
with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand,
you shall eat like those who are in flight.
It is the Passover of the LORD.
For on this same night I will go through Egypt,
striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,
and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!
But the blood will mark the houses where you are.
Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;
thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,
no destructive blow will come upon you.

"This day shall be a memorial feast for you,
which all your generations shall celebrate
with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution."

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18](#)

R. (cf. 1 Cor 10:16) **Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.**

How shall I make a return to the LORD
for all the good he has done for me?

The cup of salvation I will take up,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. **Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.**

Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.

R. **Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.**

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people.

R. **Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.**

Reading II

[1 Cor 11:23-26](#)

Brothers and sisters:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over,
took bread, and, after he had given thanks,
broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Gospel

[Jn 13:1-15](#)

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come
to pass from this world to the Father.

He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.

The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over.

So, during supper,

fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power
and that he had come from God and was returning to God,

he rose from supper and took off his outer garments.

He took a towel and tied it around his waist.

Then he poured water into a basin
and began to wash the disciples' feet
and dry them with the towel around his waist.
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,
"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"
Jesus answered and said to him,
"What I am doing, you do not understand now,
but you will understand later."
Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."
Jesus answered him,
"Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."
Simon Peter said to him,
"Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."
Jesus said to him,
"Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed,
for he is clean all over;
so you are clean, but not all."
For he knew who would betray him;
for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet
and put his garments back on and reclined at table again,
he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?
You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.
If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet,
you ought to wash one another's feet.
I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

HOMILY

My young teenage nephew recently asked me what I had been studying in school. When I told him that I was studying ethics and moral theology he was more than slightly perplexed. My brother gently explained to him that it I was studying what is right and wrong. My nephew's confusion was not reduced. He comprehended the difference between right and wrong but could not believe that a person would spend his life determining the difference. It was all quite clear to him. We simply had to ask the question "What would Jesus do?" He was unimpressed that I had spent the last three years of my life pursuing the meaning of right and wrong.

This question, or its shorthand abbreviation "WWJD," has certainly made its way into pop Christian culture. Emblazoned upon T-shirts and woven into wrist bands it became the mantra for scores of young Christian's struggling to understand right from wrong; a simple test to discern how to proceed when confronted with a complex moral dilemma. This question is deceptively simple. It proposes that there is only one answer and that the answer will be obvious. We know that life is rarely that simple and that choices are never that clear. We often find ourselves questioning the meanings of right and wrong and struggling how to live uprightly in a complex and confusing world.

We know that Jesus did not face many of the complex situations that confront us today. The open market places of Palestine have been replaced by complex financial institutions far beyond the average human comprehension. Questions of life and death are shrouded behind medical interventions never imagined by the first disciples of Jesus. The most controversial questions of immigration, national defense, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship are never addressed directly in scripture. Even though Jesus did not face these complex situations, we must not conclude that as Christians we are bereft of direction or without guidance in our lives.

The life of Jesus provides a template, a paradigm, of how we are to act. The challenge is to discern how Jesus would act within these difficult situations. In reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, William Spohn, the prominent Catholic moral theologian who died several years ago, indicated that Jesus did not tell his followers to go and do what he did. He told them clearly to go and do "likewise"; to act in accordance with the pattern of his life. That insight is prominent in this evening's Gospel. Jesus instructs his disciples to follow his example. The exact action of washing the feet of his followers is not critical. The critical element is the communication of what it means to live a life in concert with Jesus.

Jesus once again displays his willingness to live the incarnation. The pattern of his willingness to enter into human limitation, weakness, and a world distorted by sin emerges more fully. Jesus once again surrenders the glory of God, his place as master and teacher, to be of service to people in need, to respond to those who do not deserve such service, and to love in a manner that is against the prevailing culture. He abdicates the place of honor to "take the form of a slave." We who claim the name of Jesus Christ, we who choose to live as his disciples proclaim that we will live in the same pattern of life and service. We will do likewise.

We choose to do likewise because the Spirit has been given us. We are compelled to do likewise because we are called to this table. Our understanding of what we celebrate around this altar often is too limited. Too often we concentrate on receiving communion. Too often we neglect to ponder the significance of our Eucharistic celebration; we fail to recognize that this is the altar of sacrifice where the sacrifice of Jesus is made present to us. It is not simply that Jesus

is present in the Eucharist. It is more understood more adequately as the totality of his life, death, and resurrection that is made present and in our celebration and reception we are swept up into this mystery.

This mystery is not, however, exhausted at this table nor completed when we receive Communion. This mystery is lived when we go and do likewise. When we are willing leave the comfort of our lives and approach our brothers and sisters in need as Jesus got up from the table at the last supper to approach his disciples the mystery is lived in our world. When we are willing to remove the outer garments we wear to protect us as Jesus removed his garments to be available to others the sacrifice of Jesus made present in our world. So we are compelled to remove garments of exclusivity and privilege, we take off garments of arrogance and intolerance, we strip ourselves of ego and self-righteousness. And Like Jesus stooping to wash the feet of his disciples we dare to serve each other in the name of Jesus Christ as a an expression of the his mission, his sacrifice, his love.

Washing the feet or hands of each this evening is expression of what we are compelled to be in our world. We express that we are the Body of Christ, the same Body made present on this altar, the same body we receive, the same body we are challenged to become more perfectly, the same body into which we are transformed through the power of the Spirit. We are challenged as we go and do likewise.

Rev. Joseph Benedict