

HOLY THURSDAY

Jesus asks, “Do you realize what I have done for you?”

As we begin these holiest days of the year, it would be good for us to do just that, to realize what Jesus has done for us at the Last Supper.

The opening lines of the gospel set the scene. First, Jesus knew that his hour had come, and second, he loved his own to the end. In his darkest hour he did not abandon them. Jesus is about to be betrayed. He is about to be denied. He is about to be crucified. And faced with that coming reality, as that moment approaches when he is going to give the ultimate sacrifice, out of the love he has for his own, he answers with a gift. He responds with the Eucharist. He breaks the bread and says, “This is my body.” He lifts the cup and says, “This is my blood.” He offers himself to his disciples, to those who have given up everything to follow him.

Jesus is God. And he gives God to his followers. And with the words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” he gives his apostles and their successors - bishops and priests - the mission to continually bring God to the world in this unique way.

So that no matter how weary we are, no matter how rejected we feel, no matter how lonely we might be, God is present. We are nourished by Jesus’ Body and Blood. Because of Jesus, we can gather at this altar and receive Christ within us.

This is Jesus’ answer to his coming betrayal, denial, and crucifixion. It is an answer he has been giving for his entire life, but it is an answer so foreign to us that he has to keep explaining it and demonstrating it over and over again. That’s why we keep gathering Sunday after Sunday, year after year. It is not that the answer is terribly difficult or complex, but that it is hard for us to accept. We don’t think it can possibly be true.

What we receive when we accept the Body and Blood of Christ is total, unconditional love and acceptance.

In a world where we are so often evaluated, rated, and ranked, it is hard for us to conceive of a God who doesn't care about status or levels or position. That's why Peter reacts the way he does when Jesus get up in the middle of the Last Supper. He watches as Jesus takes off his outer garment, wraps a towel around himself, and begins to wash feet. And Peter is shocked. This is his Lord, this is the Messiah. The Messiah doesn't wash feet.

The feet of the disciples were not covered only in a fine dust that had settled on them from the road. Their feet were dirty and covered with mud and whatever else was to be found on the crowded streets of Jerusalem, where animals walked freely, where food was openly displayed and sold in the marketplace. Their feet were filthy, and it was the job of the lowest of the servants to wash them. And Peter, who had begun to understand Jesus as the Lord, Jesus as the Messiah, his Messiah, the great leader who was just welcomed with palm branches by the people of Jerusalem, this great descendent of David, this kingly, lordly man, lower himself to do the work of the lowest servant. And Peter won't have it. The Messiah won't wash his feet. But Jesus insists. "My feet?" Peter asks. "Yes, your feet," Jesus answers. This is what I have been telling you all along. This is who I am. This is who God is. God lower himself to serve.

In receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, Peter receives the same Messiah who lowers himself to wash his dirty feet.

We, too, receive the Eucharist. And we, too, on this Holy Thursday night are approached by Jesus. We see Jesus take off his outer garments, wrap the towel around himself, and approach us. And Jesus says to us, I am here to wash your feet. "My feet?" We ask. "Yes, your feet." When we receive the Body of Christ at the Holy Communion, this is what we are receiving - a Messiah who does not set himself above us, a servant who sees neither "Jew nor Greek, slave or free person, male or female." And that is who we are to become when we receive Christ in the

Eucharist. Jesus has given us a model, so that as he has done for us, we should also do. The most important thing of all is that we help others, regardless of their position or ours. In Christ, there are no positions, no levels, no inferiors or superiors. There are only brothers and sisters in need.

We receive the Holy Communion so that nourished by Jesus' Body and Blood, we can have the strength, not to stand tall, but to get down on our knees and help the poor, the forgotten, and the oppressed.

Jesus shows us how to take off our outer garments of power, prestige, and position and put on the towel of mercy, the towel of compassion, the towel of forgiveness, the towel of love, and to get down on our knees and help our neighbors with whatever they need, regardless of who they are. Only to the extent that we imitate Jesus the servant can we really say that we realize what he has done for us.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Tonight, when we get down on our knees in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, and when we look at the Body and Blood of Christ, it would be good for us to picture in our mind the faces of those who need us to wash their feet. And when we leave here, may the final words of tonight's gospel echo in our hearts long after this supper is finished: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."