

Homily – March 28th, 2024 – Holy Thursday



Traditionally what we celebrate on Holy Thursday is the institution of the Eucharist, the Passover meal reinterpreted by Jesus and celebrated by us to this very day. There are five accounts of the Last Supper. The earliest account comes from

Paul, as we heard in that second reading. Although Paul wasn't one of the twelve gather at the Last Supper, he nevertheless tells us that Jesus broke bread and passed a cup of wine to his apostles and told them to keep eating and drinking as often as they need to until his return.

The other four accounts of the Last Supper come from each of the four gospel writers. However, John's version, the one we heard tonight, is very different. It goes on for five chapters, a quarter of John's entire gospel, and it never once mentions Jesus breaking bread or pouring wine. All we get is a glancing statement in tonight's gospel that said, "***During the supper...***" So, Jesus did have supper with them, but the emphasis is clearly on the foot washing.

John's version of the Last Supper was written 20-30 years after the other four wrote their versions. John could have piggy-backed on the other four, but he didn't. He wanted to send out a different, perhaps a more powerful, message. John probably heard the disappointment in Paul when Paul wrote to the Corinthians scolding them on how they were gathering to celebrate Eucharist. Paul said to those in Corinth, "I cannot congratulate you. You say you are gathering for the Lord's Supper, but it is far from the Lord's Supper. You feast in one room on the best food, and you throw crumbs to the poor in the next room. How can that be the Lord's Supper?" (1 Cor. 11:17-22). After the scolding, Paul tells us what Jesus did at the Last Supper, that second reading we heard tonight.

Maybe that's why John never mentions the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine in his version of the Last Supper. He knew how easily people could distort the Eucharist and make it into something Jesus never intended it to be. It was not intended to divide people into social classes. It was to unite people around the one bread, the one cup, and the one Lord of us all. In Luke's version of the Last Supper, no sooner is the supper over than an argument breaks out among the 12 as to who was the greatest! The entire message that Jesus was trying to convey at the Last Supper was jeopardized with five minutes.

I think Eucharist and foot washing were meant to convey the same self-giving of Jesus. Whether he's pouring wine into a cup or pouring water into a basin, Jesus himself is pouring forth his life into our lives. Jesus has already told us that what we have freely received we ought to freely give.

Although the foot washing starts with the fact that ***the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus***, Judas is not Jesus' preoccupation. Jesus' consciousness is somewhere else. It's in God and not in the fact that he has just been betrayed. The next line tells us so: ***Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...*** Pretend you never heard the story before. If everything Jesus is and has, has been given to him from beyond, from God, then what will he do? He'll give it all to you tonight. What you have freely received, freely give. This is the nature of the Creator, to give life to the creature and to never stop giving life even when that life is resisted or outwardly rejected. This deep God-consciousness within Jesus forces him to do the only thing he can. He removed his outer robe and tied a towel around himself. This is revelation of the highest degree. The Word is becoming flesh once again as we were first told in the opening chapter of John's Gospel. By removing his outer garments, the deep secret of Jesus' relationship with God is now out in the open. It was never hidden, but now it's on full display.

Now comes the great contrast in the story. From God-consciousness, Jesus' consciousness of the Infinite, Jesus moves into finite care of our feet—from the highest to the lowest so to speak. Peter, and by extension you and I, doesn't like

this sudden drop from heaven down to dirty human feet. He feels there is a hierarchical order that is being violated. Peter feels he is on a lower level than Jesus, so he should be washing Jesus' feet and not the other way round. Peter can't, in that moment, receive the revelation. He would be more comfortable if Jesus would just put his garment back on and start acting like the Teacher and the Lord that Peter has in mind.

In all gospel stories, there is always a revelation of God given to us and the push back against the revelation. **"You will never wash my feet."** It's in all of us, so there's no point in asking, "Peter, what is your problem?" We are all in the same boat as Peter. The heart wants the revelation, but the mind resists it mightily.

"Unless I wash you, Peter, you can have no share with me." This is all I ever wanted to do for you, Peter, and for every person in this house of worship. All I wanted to do is to give my life to you. Why? Because it's the only trick I know; I have no hidden agenda. The Father and I are one. I only do what I see the Father do. I have freely received everything from my Father, and I want to freely give it to you, tonight. So don't ask me to refrain from doing the only thing I came to earth to do. I came to give you life. I want you to have life in abundance. If I can't wash your feet tonight, we're done. If I can't wash your feet, we go our separate ways. **You will have no share with me.** I can't do everything, Peter. I can only do what the Father has shown me. You keep setting up the terms of our relationship in such a way that I can't enter into your life. Let go of the conditions in your mind, Peter, move out of your head and move into your heart just long enough for me to wash your feet. I know you don't like it, you don't want it, and you don't get it, but later you will understand why it has to be this way. I can only do what reveals God's love. Don't ask me to stop revealing God's love.

If you know these things, blessed are you who do them. There is a connection in the Scriptures between knowing and doing. In our heightened God-consciousness, we know that God has given all things into our hands. God has poured, like water into a basin, His very life into us. Our only response is to take this knowing and put it into doing. **"I have set you an example, that you also**

should do as I have done for you.” Let’s pour ourselves into each other’s lives and wash each other’s feet. The Master is waiting to find a universe of feet waiting for his tenderness.

-Fr. Phil