

HOLY THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 This day shall be a memorial feast celebrating the Passover

Psalm 116 "Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ"

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Do this in remembrance of me ...

as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord.

Alleluia Verse: "I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you."

Gospel: John 13:1-16 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, and commands them to do likewise.

♪ Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, Deus ibi est. ♪

Do you know what those Latin words mean? There is another hymn that says the same thing in English.

♪ Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found.

Brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound. ♪

Ubi caritas et amor, where there is charity and love, Deus ibi est - God is present.

Those words are sung as part of the ancient tradition of the re-enactment of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the last supper. He *shocks* his disciples by serving them as only a slave would serve, and then *scares* them by commanding them to do the same.

He says clearly, "As I have done, so you must do."

In doing this, Jesus gives us a dramatic picture of loving service, and a revelation of what ministry means - whether by a priest, a deacon or anyone who is Baptized.

And what is it that any disciple of Jesus must do? It is in the Gospel verse for today, "I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you."

Washing feet is a living, practical - and somewhat messy sign of how far Jesus was willing to go to show his love for us. And when we let him love us, it makes a difference in our lives.

If you had been asked to have your feet washed tonight, how would you have responded? Why? Think about that for a moment. Foot-washing is not just a once a year ritual but a living *sacrament* of the way we are all called to love each other in practical ways - even when it is neither comfortable nor easy.

Sometimes it is more difficult to be present with someone who is grieving or in pain, knowing that there is nothing you can do, than to actually do something difficult. That is a way of washing someone's feet. And sometimes it's harder to allow someone to wash my feet - or to love me. It was for Peter.

We are all called to receive and to give, that's why Deacon Joe and I will wash each other's feet before washing yours, so we can both receive and give. Jesus himself not only washed the feet of his disciples, all of them, including Judas, he had his own feet washed earlier that week, when Mary of Bethany washed his feet with perfumed oil and dried them with her hair.

So he gives us another example - as I have done, so you must do. But, whether we are receiving that love or giving it, it is a living sign of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to become a part of the church, to live as a member of the body of Christ.

The Gospel story you heard refers to the *Passover* of Jesus - his death on a cross and resurrection from the dead. It recalls the 1st reading, which tells the story of the Jewish Passover - but there is an important difference. Jesus did not kill anyone.

He *changes* the part of the story where God kills the firstborn of the Egyptians. The people of Israel could not conceive of any other way to be set free than for God to kill their enemies, & for them to sacrifice an innocent lamb. Jesus shows us another way. He **becomes** the lamb of God and reveals the way of love and forgiveness.

There is a story that is often a part of the Passover haggadah - the rabbinic stories told at this feast. In this story, which anticipates the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, when the angels rejoiced at the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, God rebuked them, saying, "The *Egyptians* are also *My people*, and the work of *My hands*."

The commandment to love as Jesus loved is the bridge that joins the reading from St. Paul with the Gospel story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. But to understand that connection we need to know the context of the story in the rest of chapter 11 of Paul's 1st letter to the Christians at Corinth.



Before the words we heard in the 2nd reading, Paul writes about the divisions & unresolved conflicts in the community. Some were claiming to be more important than others, and putting down the sick and the poor. When St. Paul says, "The Body of the Lord", he means *first of all* the real presence of Christ in the gathered community as well as in the bread and the wine consecrated at the Eucharist.

All of us together are called & empowered to **be** the Body of Christ. As I sing during the Eucharistic Prayer - *♪ We are the Body of Christ. ♪*

What he is saying is that you cannot claim to love Jesus if you do not care for all the members of his body.

In the reading from St. Paul, we heard the words, "*do this in remembrance of me*" twice when he tells the story of the Last Supper.

In the Passion according to Luke on Palm Sunday, when the Last Supper was recalled, we heard the same words we hear during every Eucharistic Prayer "*do this in memory of me,*"

What is Jesus asking his followers to do, as he is on the brink of entering into his last hours? He is not only commanding them & us to continue to celebrate the Eucharist. He is commanding all who will follow him to allow others to wash their feet, as well as to wash the feet of others - to love one another in practical and nurturing ways, -
to *See* Christ in others & *Be* Christ for others.



He is saying to us today:
Love one another as I have loved you,
do **this** in memory of me.

Forgive one another as I have forgiven
you, do **this** in memory of me.

Live as my body in the world,
accept your own participation in my
passion and death, Do **this** in memory
of me!

Trust in the hope that you will rise from sin, suffering & death as I did

Do **this** in memory of me!

There is another hymn that sums up the message of this night. It has two Spanish phrases, which are pretty obvious.

El cuerpo de cristo - the Body of Christ & la sangre del Señor - the blood of the lord.
It's in your hymnals. I want to end by playing it and singing it - and inviting you to sing it with me.

♪ *A-men. El Cuerpo de Cristo. A-men. La Sangre del Señor*
Eating your body, drinking your blood, we become what we receive. Amen, A-men. ♪