

## Holy Thursday – 2021B

When something important or significant happens in our life we want to remember it. Today, we have cameras in our phones that can take pictures in a second and upload them to Facebook or Snapchat or Instagram where they can be seen all over the world.

But we should not forget that for thousands of years the way that we remembered something was to create a ritual for it and then pass it down through tradition, year after year. It may have been something we wanted to celebrate, or an occasion where we were very sad and we wanted to remember. But it was always something important, a lesson that we could pass on to the next generation.

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus gathered with his apostles to celebrate the Passover, a ritual that was already 1500 years old back then. And at that dinner, he gave new meaning and new significance to bread and wine that were part of the Passover ritual. As we hear from our second reading tonight, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Jesus institutes the Eucharistic meal with the words that we all know so well "this is my body," "this is my blood," "do this in remembrance of me." Now Paul's letter is actually the earliest written record we have of the Last Supper. It was earlier than the first gospel Mark, which was written a few years later. To make sure we remembered this momentous occasion, this event is captured not just by Paul and Mark but in Matthew and Luke as well.

Now in tonight's Gospel, we hear the beginning of John's gospel account of that night. John devotes five whole chapters to the Last Supper. Five chapters. More than all the other Gospels combined. And yet curiously, he does not have any reference to the Eucharistic meal. Why is that?

Was John not a believer in the Eucharist? Hardly. You could argue the entire Gospel of John is one long Eucharistic prayer. It's loaded with lines like "I am the bread of life" and "unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will not have life within you." No John was a big fan of the Eucharist. Yet he still chose not to include the dinner in his account of the Last Supper. Why would he do that?

Well, I'll hazard a guess. John's Gospel was written after the other three Gospels and probably 40 years after Paul's letter and 60 years after the event took place. By

that point in time, it's very likely that the ritual of celebrating the Eucharistic meal was already well established within the early Christian church. So maybe the writer of John saw that Christians were already remembering the Eucharistic meal and he wanted to make sure that we didn't miss something else. What was that something else? The washing of the feet.

What is so special about washing of the feet that John would choose to include this ritual and his gospel and not the Eucharistic meal? Well let's go back over 2000 years to Palestine and think about what life was like. Most of the people in Palestine, certainly all of the poor people, walked around barefoot. If you had shoes, they were sandals. You walked everywhere, on dirty roads following even dirtier animals. To say that your feet were dirty is a great understatement. So, when you went into someone's house, you had your feet washed because back then, when you sat down to eat you were lying on a couch with someone's feet right next to you.

In well-to-do households in Palestine, the washing of feet would be done by a servant or a slave. It was **not ever** done by the guest of honor, by the rabbi, by the master. But on this night, it was different. Jesus wrapped a towel around himself, took a basin and then got down on his knees and started washing the feet of his apostles.

Jesus was demonstrating that to love as he loves, to follow him, you must be willing to serve, to get down on your hands and knees and get dirty. In the kingdom of heaven there is no job too small, too menial, or "beneath you." To follow him means to live a life of service. And so, to get us started, Jesus begins, as usual, at the bottom. By washing feet.

John wants us to remember that the Eucharist was not given to us to stand on its own. The Eucharist is glorious. Through it, God abides in us and we in God. God shares his love with us. When we receive communion, we receive forgiveness from God. When we get down and wash our neighbor's feet, we share our life and love with our neighbor; we both give and receive forgiveness to/from each other.

So as glorious as the Eucharist is, it is not simply a private act of devotion meant to square our debts with God. It is a call to action. We are the body of Christ, his hands, his legs. After we have been fed our spiritual food, it's time to get up from the Eucharistic table and walk out into the kingdom and get busy, busy with the often-dirty

work of living as Christ commands us. Healing, helping, hiring, teaching, listening, loving.

Now are all of us supposed to go out and find a dirty job to do? That is not for me to say. The spirit pulls all of us in different ways – and for some, getting on our hands and knees may not be how we are called to serve. But whether we are called to it or not, one place we can all start is by honoring and respecting those that do the difficult and dirty jobs. There are no small jobs in the Kingdom of Heaven. And John's gospel is a reminder as to which one Jesus chose to serve as an example.

So tonight, we will once again remember the Last Supper by celebrating its great ritual and sacrament – the Eucharistic meal. Come to the table and take, eat. Savor it. But let us not forget that the Eucharist is not complete, without the washing of the feet. When our meal is over, we must go out into the world and serve. If we can find a dirty job to do, do it. If we can't, find someone who is already doing it and thank them.

Deacon Gerry

