

REFLECTION FOR HOLY THURSDAY 2021

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14 Corinthians 11:23-26 John 13:1-15

As we celebrate this Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, I have to wonder: did the disciples of Jesus miss the meaning of the meal?

Did any of the disciples understand what the heart of Jesus was saying to them as He broke the bread, passed the cup, washed their feet?

At the last Supper, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it. "This is my body. Given for you. This is my blood, poured out for you."

+ When we feel utterly isolated, Jesus says in this meal, "I am here, with you, loving you."

+ When we conclude that our life has no purpose, Jesus says in this meal, "I'm here, leading you."

+ When we run out of strength, and we're not sure how to go on, Jesus says in this meal, "I am the bread of life. I will nourish you, strengthen you, walk with you. And love you."

+ When our soul screams, 'Where are you Lord?' He answers in this meal – "Here I am, right where I told you I would be. This bread – my body. This cup – my blood. This meal – my presence. I am here. Loving you."

Did the disciples of Jesus miss the meaning of the meal?

Apparently, Jesus was not sure His disciples would comprehend the meaning of the meal! After all, these were the men who, with startling consistency, missed the meaning of so much of what Jesus said and did.

These were the men who heard Jesus predict his passion – then they argued about who would get the best seats in His kingdom.

These were the men who heard Jesus say – 'you must pick up your cross every day - then they fought over who was the greatest.

Jesus kept talking about service and self-giving – then they kept talking about honours and rank.

So, in the middle of the meal which reveals the heart of our God, the Saviour stands up, takes off his cloak, wraps a towel around his waist, and proceeds to do the task that was usually reserved to the lowliest servant or slave. That is why Peter objected to it. Peter didn't think it was right that Jesus should assume the role reserved for the lowliest servant or a slave in a household.

Jesus did what a servant would do. He washed the filthy feet of these proud-hearted disciples.

He washed the feet of Peter – who later that night would deny that He even knew Jesus.

He washed the feet of Thomas – who would become so full of doubt that ‘doubt’ became his nickname.

He washed the feet of Judas – His betrayer

This is what love looks like: the Creator of the universe, on His knees, on the floor serving. Humility. Self-giving. Doing what needs to be done. Not trying to sort out whether the recipient is worthy of our generosity.

In the washing of the feet, Jesus is showing us the meaning of this meal, the meaning of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the heart of everything. But it can never be separated from the washing of the feet. The two realities are linked. Being in communion with Jesus must mean being in communion with others. Jesus gives himself to us here, so that we in our turn may give ourselves to others.

The Eucharist is the meal in which the Risen Lord nourished us and send us into the messy needs of the world, with one instruction on His lips: ‘Get to work. As I have done, you must do. As I have served, so must you.’

The Eucharist is that meal which means, ‘your life does not belong to you.’ If you have a talent or skill, God gave it to you so that you can give it away. If you have energy, God gave it to you so that you can get down on your knees and humbly serve your neighbour.

If you have breath in you, then today is another day when you can think less of your needs, and find your life’s purpose in serving the needs of others.

The Eucharist means that, in all things, I can say ‘thank you’ to God. ‘Thank you for another day, thank you of a chance to serve, thank you for the people you send into the dining room of my life, those people with proud hearts and filthy feet and broken lives – and you tell me to bend down, serve them, love them.’

“As I have done, you must do.”

And who knows? He may even send you to serve the Judases in your life – the ones who have betrayed you or broken your heart.

“As I have done, you must do.”

What is the meaning of this meal? It is the place where we always know we can find Him – or rather, where He finds us.

But He never lets us stay for too long. There is still work to do, there are still hearts to be mended, hungers to be fed, feet to be washed.

So He does not let us linger. He sends us out the door – nurtured and nourished.

“Go. As I have done, you must do.”

The meaning of this meal is... love, His love. Do not miss it. The meaning of this meal is love. Live it.
Fr Patrick