

Holy Thursday – April 9, 2020

Tonight we begin the Easter Triduum – the three most holy days of the church year when we celebrate Christ’s gift of the Eucharist to us, his suffering and death, and his resurrection from the dead.

Normally these days have special rituals that we participate in such as the commemoration of Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples, the veneration of the cross and the lighting of the Easter fire, and much more. Last night was the beginning of the Jewish Passover and I watched a presentation and explanation of their Passover seder ritual and meal. Much like the Jewish community’s celebration of Passover which they have done in their homes for more than 2,000 years as way to remain connected to their roots, and their historical identity and to the core pillars of their faith, so our celebration of the rituals of the Easter Triduum teach and sustain us in our identity as the new people of God in Christ, and in regard to the origins of our faith and the core pillars of our faith.

The rituals of Passover and the rituals of our Easter Triduum involve our bodies and our senses and in their concreteness remind us that these mysteries of our faith are not just facts and ideas in our minds but give new meaning to all that we do daily.

When I visited with my spiritual director a week and a half ago, he talked at one point about all the people all concerned that they were being deprived of going to Mass these days. His response to them he said, was to first agree, yes, that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of our faith life, but then to remind them that even more important than going to Mass and receiving Communion was that we become what we eat. It is not just a matter of going to Mass; the question is: are we being transformed by our sharing in the Mass?

I believe that this is the concern of St. John in his Gospel tonight. I am always surprised when I hear this Gospel regarding the Last Supper and he doesn’t give us an account of the actual meal which we hear about in the other Gospels and in the reading from St. Paul tonight, but instead tells us in detail about Jesus washing the feet

of his disciples. But, I believe that his concern is that we not just participate in the Mass or Lord's Supper as Jesus commanded us to do, but that we put its meaning into practice and put the life of Christ that he shares with us in the Mass into actions of service.

Just before this last meal with his disciples Jesus had painfully observed his disciples arguing amongst themselves about who was the greatest. He doesn't need to wash their feet which would have been washed earlier probably by servants when came into the house for the meal. Rather he does this humble ritual to show them how they must follow him.

Christ came to serve and not to served. This, he said, is how others will know that we are his disciples --- by our loving service to others – even to our betrayers such as Judas whose feet Jesus also washed. --As we say this and see this action by Jesus, we are blessed to see this in action in the many who are taking great risks in serving us and others during this pandemic – everyone from people who clean our bathrooms, to those who work in the stores to those in the medical profession.

Jesus gave us the Eucharist as a memorial of his death and resurrection – the total gift of himself for the salvation of all the world and all nations. It is also a pledge of his love and a way for him to show us that he remains with us in this life and is within us.

It was only after sharing his life with his disciples and journeying with them for three years that Jesus asked his disciples not just to follow him but to “abide in him as he did in them” through sharing in his very body and blood in the Eucharist. It was only after the disciples had grown in spiritual maturity, through struggles and joy, that they were sent out ‘two by two’ to “go out and make disciples of all nations.”

May the reminders of Jesus' action in tonight's Gospel and the actions of so many trying to serve others during this pandemic help us to more and more “**become** what we have eaten” so many times prior to this time in which we are now deprived of the Eucharist, but still have Christ dwelling in us.