

April 9, 2020

Mass of the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday

John 13:1-15

[Receiving the Sacrament was never meant to be an end in itself but as a grounding to live a life of service to others and our world, as Jesus did, and as his people are called to do. You can't receive Eucharist tonight, but you can BE Eucharist tonight and every day.]

Such a beautiful, soulful, and life-shaping Gospel account we just heard. What strikes me between the eyes is the Freedom of Jesus to do whatever he wants and the choice he makes.

He knew himself as the Beloved Son of God,

He knew as we heard that he had come from God and was returning to God.

He knew further that all power had been given to him.

Truly, he was free to do whatever he wanted. He chose to wash his disciples' feet. He chose to serve. He chose to allow himself to be arrested and crucified.

I remember when my brother who is five years older than me got a summer job at the Home of the Lumberjack Breakfast: Paul Bunyan's. There's a Paul Bunyan's in the Dells, but he got the job closer to home, in Minocqua. I remember traveling up with my parents to move him into his quarters where he would be staying. To my pampered self, it looked rough. There were spiders and bugs in the shower and only a screen door with gaps in the frame to keep out any other takers. I rode back home with my folks admiring my brother's courage and afraid I wouldn't be able to do it myself. It turned out that he came back a few days later himself. Apparently the work was worse than the living quarters, like slave labor, so he came home and found a job at a local paper mill that paid more and allowed him to live at home without the company of spiders.

That was a good choice he made. It might have been different if it were a family business. Or if he'd gone into that environment thinking it was something that God wanted him to do. **What helps you to choose things that are truly distasteful? Parents do it all the time, from cleaning babies bottoms to driving older bottoms all over the city to different practices and events. Why? Because they love their children?**

Jesus chose to take the role of a slave and wash feet; he chose the next day to give his life on a cross. Why? Love of course.

But what specific good is his loving supposed to do for us? He chose to serve and die to assure us we are precious in God's eyes, to forgive our sins, to be in solidarity with suffering humanity. Also, he showed us **the way to eternal life ourselves, which is abandonment to God's will, in service to others.**

I like so much the parable that the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis tells about his grandfather who love, more than anything, the island of Crete, his homeland, which he fought over for years against the Turks. He tells the story that on his deathbed he insisted on holding on to soil from Crete, so tightly that even the priests prying hands could not pry under the soil to apply the saving unction of the sacrament. And so he went to the gates of heaven where he was greeted warmly by St. Peter. "Uh, just one thing, though, if you want to come in you'll have to let go of whatever you're holding in your hand." "Never!" he said. This is CRETE!" They went back and forth several times and finally St. Peter just left him alone. Days passed and finally, not by will but by exhaustion, his hand lost the tight grip and

the soil, grain by grain began falling from his hand. Horror seized his heart when he felt the last of the soil leave him. Then he heard the gates of heaven open, and looking through he saw before him the entire island of Crete.

Jesus tells us again and again the path to joy and eternal life, and surprise surprise, it's not getting a lot of money and comfort. If you would gain yourself, you must lose yourself. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The last shall be first. Those who are humbled will be exalted. Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant; whoever wishes to be first must be your slave.

That's the meaning of the washing of the feet and one of the meanings of the Cross. If I, your master and teacher, have washed your feet, so must you do for others. He took bread, broke and gave it saying, this is my body given for you...my blood, poured out for you.

So much of Christian spirituality is about our desire. Let me ask during this Mass of the Lord's Supper, how much do you desire Communion with Jesus? How much do you desire union with God? Our inability to receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus can be an opportunity to increase that desire in our hearts. And I want to suggest that this desire is most potently satisfied, not simply by receiving the sacrament. **Receiving the Sacrament was never meant to be an end in itself but as a grounding to live a life of service to others and our world, as Jesus did, and as his people are called to do. You can't receive Eucharist tonight, but you can BE Eucharist tonight and every day.**

We might ask ourselves on this Holy Thursday, how we're doing with that. Or, more pointedly, in these days of stress, these days of coronavirus, are we becoming more selfish or more generous, more worried about ourselves or more of a servant. Can you imagine yourself in a grocery store spying another coming from the other direction walking to the last bag of Cheetos on the shelf, or, God forbid, the last pack of toilet paper? Could you yield in service? It probably depends on how active in your heart is the example of Jesus who washed his disciples' feet. If his example, and the love within that example, is in your heart, your act of yielding will not leave you feeling deprived but filled with the vision of the whole island of Crete, the whole Kingdom of God, in front of you.