

Holy Thursday Homily
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April 18, 2019

Today's readings are filled with the "Good News" of God's intimate love for each of us.

The first reading from Exodus sets forth the ritual prescriptions for the Passover Meal, a remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. In this passage, we learn of a God who passes over the Israelites as a protective angel, preserving them from harm, saving them, nourishing them, serving them and leading them out of bondage into freedom. Through these loving actions, God established an intimate relationship with the Israelites. This is our God, too. To have this same intimate relationship, we only have to open ourselves to receive the wondrous gifts that are given to us through God's spectacular acts of love.

In the passage we heard from the Gospel of John, there is sense of urgency as Jesus moves closer to the time of his death and resurrection. Jesus knew his time with his disciples was coming quickly to an end. So he chose to show them, one more time, the love and power of God through the actions of a servant. Jesus descends to his knees, pours water into a basin and washes the disciples' feet. Jesus' gesture was disconcerting, especially to Peter. It was also very intimate.

In his commentary, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, Jean Vanier proposes this gesture of washing another's feet creates and expresses a "communion of hearts." Jesus has personal contact with each disciple as he washes his feet individually, this being an intense moment of communion expressed through the body.

Vanier also interprets Jesus' gesture as enacting a "totally new vision" transforming the model of society from a hierarchical pyramid to an inclusive body attentive to the least in their midst. At a moment when Jesus might have had supreme pride, he showed a profound depth of humility. Here the lesson is acted out. Jesus shows us that we are to strip ourselves of our pretensions, giving of ourselves in humble, selfless service and be divested of particular interests or desirous of applause.

Love is always like that. When, for example, someone falls ill, the person who loves her will perform the most menial services and delight to do them, because love is like that. Just think of how many times we see this selfless love shared with one another here on this campus. The deepest bonds between community members lie in their shared love and vulnerable, common humanity.

And then in the reading from Corinthians we hear the rest of the story of the last supper. This short text is a precious summary of Jesus's institution of the Eucharist, a moment of profound self-giving. Through each detail, Paul underscores the great significance of the ritual we are privileged to celebrate here tonight. The heart of the Eucharist is found in the words of Jesus: "...do this in remembrance of me."

Through our receiving of the Eucharist, we will find, by God's grace, that for the sake of the world we too are called to be handed over in service, in pursuit of justice, and in costly love for our enemies. We will find that we are to be poured out rather than to acquire, that we are sent to be broken for the sake of others, rather than kept somewhere safe and unbothered.

We become what we receive and consume: the body of Christ for the sake of the world. The story of the Last Supper is the story of God's grace at work.

God who created us out of love, for love, and in order to love us, offers us the divine gift of self-giving love. Let us open our arms, hearts and souls to freely embrace this gift and then let it flow generously from us into the world.