

God's Way of Serving Others Holy Thursday: Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper
April 13, 2017 7:30 PM Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; **Jn 13:1-15**
(Three great ideas)

Tonight we begin the solemn remembrance of Passover of Christ, and his suffering and death and his resurrection. From the Jewish point of view, tonight is already Friday, the day Jesus shall die. The readings present for us, for our chewing, **three great ideas**. The first is from the first reading: **the Passover**. When I went to the second graders, I asked them, "Now tell me, why did God tell the Hebrew people to put blood on the lintels and their doorposts?" And they said, "Well so that God would know that the people there were the Hebrews, the Israelites." I said, "Well, that's very plausible, but it can't be true. Don't you think God would know where the Israelites were all along?" And they said, "Well, yeah, that's true." God would have to know this, so why the blood on the lintels? Well, they couldn't figure out a good reason; so I told them. **The reason for the blood on the lintels is that God wants people to participate in the saving work that he proposes**; and that was a way of saying, yes, I accept your proposal, liberation, in that case, from Egypt. It's important that we note this because it's a pattern throughout salvation history. **God is always inviting, but then expecting a response**, which is often not happening. Now you may have received invitations with the little letters RSVP. That means we want to know if you are coming or not. But it doesn't much matter if you answer or not, unless you show up unexpectedly and there's no place for you. Other than that, people don't follow that slavishly. But in this case, **not putting the blood out actually meant to be included in the death of the eldest male of family and flock—a pretty dire result**. Now very often failing to respond to God actually does have dire results, but they are not so obvious. **The celebration of Passover was meant to remind the people of how important it was to participate in God's purposes and respond to his invitations**. That's the first big idea.

The second one comes from **St. Paul who follows the synoptic Gospels in saying that before Jesus died he had a Passover meal with his disciples**. Now John doesn't say that. For John the Passover is the day after Jesus died, but for Paul and Mark and all the rest this meal we commemorate was a Passover. But there was a strange twist: all of a sudden **Jesus took the matzoth and he transformed it into himself so that he could feed his disciples with his own life, with his own death, with all that he is. Then he took the wine and in a similar way he transformed it into the very blood that he would pour out later that day on the Cross**.

Now people ask the question, "Well, **how can Jesus really be food?**" For some it's really an unpleasant thought. Well think a moment about the **food chain**. Think about every living organism eats something and then in turn is eaten by something. That's called the food chain. It's a fact of life. Except when you get to the human species, **no one eats human beings**, except possibly other human beings, and that has always been considered rather disgusting. However, **human beings are constantly being eaten from within by anxieties and fears and distrust and confusion and ultimate knowledge of our own mortality**. That can eat human beings up.

Now **Jesus' answer to all this is voluntary surrender of oneself to the loving Father from whom we all have come**. Use your mortal life as food for others' well-being, and you'll have no regrets. Spend your life for others, and you will be like God. The fact that Jesus' death was so cruel and bloody and torturous only makes his decision and his teaching all the more

courageous and costly. **He meant and still means that his disciples celebrating the Eucharist are to awaken to the same willingness to spend themselves for others.** And the real presence of his body and blood under the appearance of ordinary food, ordinary bread, ordinary wine is an empowering energy for all who participate in it intentionally and consciously. That's the second big idea.

It would be enough, but tonight is special, so there's a third big idea. It takes a different form. If you remember in the reading from Philippians, this ancient hymn, ancient even to St. Paul, which said, "Son though he was, Jesus did not cling to equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." This is a description, poetic description, of what we call the **mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of God taking on human form.** At the Last Supper in **John's version**, this poem took physical shape when **Jesus laid aside his role of master and washed the feet of his servants**, whom he finally called friends. Peter recognizes the incongruence of all this and protests. He tries to rectify Jesus' errant behavior and therefore calls him "Master" to remind him who he is—apparently he forgot. But the God that Jesus is revealing is not the God that human imagination ordinarily thinks of, where power always serves itself, and so people imagine God, the supreme power, must be about serving himself. **The self-giving love that Jesus shows had no precedent in the disciples' experience—for that matter, in hardly anyone's experience.**

The ritual we will repeat tonight is really nice, but it's not the real point. Jesus didn't mean wash each other's feet in church. What he really meant was **serve those who are inferior to you; that's God's way. Serve those who are weaker than you; that's God's way. Serve those who are less than you are; that's God's way.** And not only is this to be done sporadically, but in fact **it should become now the new paradigm, the new template for human society**, remade in the image and the likeness of the true, living God, revealed certainly and fully and clearly in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth. Now this is quite a challenge. It's not actually only countercultural; **it's against our nature.** We have a nature that has put us at the top of the food chain. It's called sometimes evolution. But **the Paschal mystery leads us into God's plan for our future**; and just like the Exodus centuries ago, it is God's answer to the cries of his people.