

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Unequal Friendship

Holy Thursday: Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

March 29, 2018 7:30 PM Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; **Jn 13:1-15**

(We need to care for those who are lesser than us.)

Tonight we begin the Passover of the Lord. We read a small section from the Gospel according to John, but actually the story of **the Last Supper in the Gospel according to John** goes on for pages and pages. But you should not think of this as Jesus actually talking the night away with these profound thoughts, rather it is **the beloved disciple who is synthesizing Jesus' entire life and the meaning of his whole life as the beloved disciple himself understands it, and expressing this as a farewell.** Now the beloved disciple was one of Jesus' most favorite; that's why he is called beloved disciple. He probably was not one of the twelve, but like Mary Magdalene very close, very intimate with Jesus, in spite of not being one of twelve. And **his perspective gives us something really to think about.**

The part that jumps off the page to me is the part where he says, **"I call you no longer servants,"** or the same word "slaves," **"but I call you friends."** Now I think this is a very powerful idea because the Catholic saints have often talked about God as being a friend. I believe this is what we are being drawn to, an understanding of **God as our friend**; and this is not any kind of traditional religion. No religion ever said that, least of all Judaism, but Jesus said it. I think we have to heed it. We have to listen to it. We have to appreciate it. **We have to relish it.** When it comes to a friend, St. Thomas reflected on this and he said, well, a friend is someone who will say, **"What is mine is yours; what is yours is mine."** Of course St. Thomas gets that from Aristotle, but it doesn't matter; it's beautiful. It's a marvelous thought, and St. Thomas applies it to this night that Jesus is saying, "All that is mine is yours, and all that is yours is mine." **This is a basic exchange, which is proper to friendship.**

Now **it's unequal** because God is the ground of all being and the Creator of everything, and we are just "little old us." But that doesn't matter. God is perfectly happy for us to be just poor old little us, but **he wants us to be with him in our poverty or illness or joy or success or failure or whatever.** All of it is what he wants: friendship.

We want to be with our friends, and **the most profound way we want to be with our friends is at a meal.** If you have somebody you really like, you invite them to dinner. If you tell

me you have a dear friend and you have never had a meal together, I'll say that's really not a dear friend. So you make dinner, you go out to eat, you meet for lunch; if you're really desperate, you agree to go to breakfast, but you eat together. **This is one of the most intimate forms of communication.** It caused a great scandal in the early Church when Christian Jews were completely uncomfortable having a meal with Christian gentiles, because they were still Jews and that was against their ethic, their Law, their Torah; they had to grow out of it, and it was very painful. Jesus was constantly being attacked by the Pharisees, the upholders of the Torah, because **he ate with sinners**, public outcasts, publicans, prostitutes; he had dinner with them. **This was a grave "no-no," but he did it.**

And frankly, he is doing it again by gathering us together for a meal. That's why the **Eucharist** is such a central part of the Christian mystery, because **God is gathering together his friends to share with them himself.** Again, **it's a very unequal sharing.** He is giving us the body, the blood, the soul, and the divinity of the risen Christ; and **we have what to give back?** Well we have a lot of **troubles** and doubts, problems, but also we have our **gratitude**, our service, the fruit of our work. **All this, good and bad, we give to God through Christ, who connects everything together offering himself and us to the Father,** which is why St. Augustine said that "the whole Christ," meaning all of us, "is offering the whole Christ to the Father." This is true worship in Spirit and truth, which the Father really desires, as Jesus told the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman. This is what we mean by the sacrifice of the Mass: Christ uniting himself to us offers all of us to the Father.

Now "the truth will make us free." **The more we are aware of our intimate dependence upon God, the more we can surrender our self-will and self-love to God, the happier and the holier we become.** It's not that God gets closer to us; God can't be any closer. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, but we become more aware of God's closeness. And **this awareness changes us totally**, changes our self-image, our way of feeling, our way of thinking, our way of acting, our way of everything. Our lives change, and we become more grateful and willing to serve. **That is why we call this meal "Eucharist" from the Greek word for thank you, *efcharisto*.**

Now God's goal is obviously to help us become more God. Now this may seem absurd to you, but St. Thomas makes it clear when he talks about the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. He says, "**God becomes human so that human beings can become God.**" He doesn't say like God; he says God. We become so close that we are **united perfectly and wholly with God**, as St. Thomas said is the only true being; everything else just is in God, and St. Paul says that as well: "In God we live and move and have our being." Now these may seem to you deep thoughts. They are, but they are not unavailable to you. **You can really gain a lot by meditating on them.**

So God helps us give generously and love unconditionally, especially serving those who are less than we are. And that's the idea, not imitating necessarily the washing of feet. That's not the point. We do that. It's lovely. I encourage you all to participate. But the point is **he who is the master is washing the feet of his lesser friends. And we need to care for those who are lesser than us.** I am speaking of course of **the poor of the world.** That is the gospel message. That's what Jesus is talking about tonight. And so we proceed with this beautiful gesture, the washing of the feet.