

**A Servant Doing**      Holy Thursday: Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper      April 18, 2019  
Ex 12:1-8, 11-14;      1 Cor 11:23-26;      **Jn 13:1-15**      (He simply said, "As I have done you must also do.")

This day, Holy Thursday, in my childhood was a very favorite day for me. If the weather was beautiful like yesterday or the day before, my mother took us to the Arboretum for a walk. In the evening my father took me, not my brothers, for whatever reason I don't know, but me to church. He was a faithful choir member and he always wanted to attend the liturgies. Later on I met Jewish people and shared the Seder, and that made this evening even more significant to me. But I think there is a way in which our history and our past can actually block what the Spirit wants to do right now. **So I suggest that we let go of even our fondest memories or our idea of what we do on Holy Thursday, and think about or simply be present to what the Spirit is saying.**

Surely on the **first Holy Thursday**, which of course in Jewish reckoning is Friday already, Jesus intended to reveal something new; it was a big moment. I doubt the disciples were prepared. Rightly, the Church remembers the Last Supper as the gift of the sacrament of the Eucharist, but too often we have thought about the Eucharist as if it were a static presence on our altar, in the tabernacle; whereas **Jesus thought of Eucharist as a dynamic presence within us transforming who we are.** And thus he tied it to his **total self-offering**, which he would make later that same day, in the morning. Thus he says, **"My body given up."** Those words refer to the cross. **"My blood poured out,"** again, obviously a **reference to the cross.**

And **John's Gospel** is remarkable in talking about this powerful transformation without even mentioning the **elements of bread and wine. He doesn't even mention them.** It's a supper, but there's no food. He uses a different tack. **Disciples were servants;** that's what a disciple was. The disciples washed the clothes of the master. Disciples cooked the meals for the master. Disciples ran the master's errands. That was their job. They also learned along the way, but they were not full-time students. They were servants; they were slaves. The word in Greek, *doúlos*, is really "slave." Now Jesus in order to transform their very idea of who they are and who he is and who God is, turns the tables on them and takes this towel and **washes their feet.** This was the role of the lowest slave. There was a hierarchy, and the lowest slave was the foot washer. Now this doubtless caused them consternation, and it should cause us consternation as well. We should think about what this is saying, not just about Jesus, but about God. **It's meant to be a revelation of what God is like and what God wills.** And then poignantly he says, **"You must do likewise."**

In chapter 8, Jesus has a very argumentative moment with some of his followers, following at least physically, following but arguing, and he had a lot of those. These are protesting that they are never and have never been slaves because they are children of Abraham. And Jesus' remark is, **"If you are children of Abraham, then do as Abraham did."** **This is the idea of doing: faith as doing, belief as doing.** If you are Abraham's children, then act like Abraham. He also said, **"I only do what I see the Father doing."** This is all about doing: "I only do what I see the Father doing." So therefore if you want to be children of the heavenly Father, if you want to be children of Abraham, if you want to be part of the reality I'm revealing to you, then you must do likewise. **You must also become a servant. And this is all Jesus asks.** He does not ask to be served, to be

worshiped, to be adored, to be admired, to be feared, or to be praised, all of which we do at some point or another. But the question is, **do we really get the message of who God is and therefore what God really wants?**

So while Jesus turns the tables on his disciples and becomes their slave, he does not make them his master. They are not his master; his master is only the Father. And **he remains their master because the master is also the servant of all, and he is par excellence the servant of all; so he has a whole new idea of what it means to be a master.** And that's what he is teaching tonight. **So he doesn't reverse roles; he combines them: servant-master.**

But moreover he says, **"I call you no longer servants but friends."** Now St. Thomas Aquinas thought this was the most important part of the whole gospel, because **a friend is defined by this: "what is mine is yours and what is yours is mine."** **Jesus is giving his totality to his disciples.** That means his divinity. That means his soul. That means his body. That means his blood. **This is another way of talking about Eucharist, or Eucharist is another way of talking about friendship. Friendship is another way of talking about equality.** These are profound ideas not ordinarily understood the way the Bible presents them, because in our minds everything is filtered through our society, our culture, our language, none of which has actually been deeply influenced by the Bible.

**So this night reveals two things: the true nature of God and the invitation to equality with God in service to the world.** Here **believing is doing**, so the whole tiresome controversy about faith and work is really superseded before it even gets started. And the saints get it. But many people who believe they are believers don't, because they never get around to doing. Many people continue to admire, adore, praise, and worship Jesus, which is very edifying and not wrong, and can even give us strength, but it isn't what he asked for. **He simply said, "As I have done you must also do." Copy that!**