

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper  
Holy Thursday  
April 21, 2011

The first Holy Thursday raised two challenges. The first challenge came to Jesus, the second to his apostles. The challenge to Jesus? He had to go, and he wanted to stay. On the next day he would have to leave the apostles. It was his Father's will. But never had he loved his favorite friends as dearly as at this supper. How could he possibly leave them?

Jesus' solution? He will go, and he will stay. He will leave us, and he will remain with us. He will take from his disciples, from us, the bodily charm of his presence. No longer will his friends hear the music and thunder of his voice, sense the fascination of his smile, or be touched by his tears. And still he will stay, will leave with us the reality, the truth, of that presence.

How? Jesus took bread, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat. This is my body." Then the cup, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant." In the Eucharist, the Jesus of Palestine indeed remains with us. Not only a real presence, but the realization of Jesus' startling promise some months earlier, "Whoever eats of me will live because of me."

Move now to Holy Thursday's second challenge, the challenge to the apostles. Jesus rose from the table, took off his robe, tied a towel around his waist, and washed the feet of the Twelve. Only Peter, as usual, protested. But surely all were surprised, even embarrassed. For it was an act that could not be required of the lowest Jewish slave.

Back at the table, Jesus challenged his disciples: "You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I... have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." The challenge is to be *women and men for others*.

All of which leads neatly to you and me. The same two challenges: Eucharist and foot washing. A subtle peril lurks in daily Communion – the peril that haunts almost anything we experience time and time again – within clergy or laity, in the pulpit or at a desk job. Early on, sheer delight. With time, mere routine. We must try to recapture every so often the glow that lights up a first Communion, the Communion at an ordination, or the Communion at a wedding.

But our Eucharist is not a private party, a “me and Jesus” experience. The Jesus who told his disciples “This is my body which is given for you” told the same disciples that they must wash one another’s feet. The same Jesus gives you and me his body and blood, soul and divinity, and insists that we be men and women in service to others, loving as he loves.

Yes. Communion and compassion go together, not only on Holy Thursday but every day. Happily, I find this commitment to service in the residents and parishioners here at Christ Our Hope Church in the Josephinum Apartments and among our friends in downtown Seattle: the Christ-like caring for each other evidenced in the mutual help we give to one another. Christ is alive among us. Simple yet important moments of service make every day here at Christ Our Hope a Holy Thursday, the Eucharistic Christ living among us, the Servant Christ serving with us. Thank you for your ministry of love.

Paul A. Magnano  
Pastor