

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

March 28, 2013

How are we transformed into people who can be recognized as Christians by our love? Not by being the most famous, or the best at what we do, or by being higher up the ladder than someone else. We are transformed by our service to others. We cooperate with God's salvific activity by washing one another's feet. Jesus challenges us on this the eve of his passion and death: "Do you understand what I just did for you?" He doesn't ask, "Do you understand what I am going to do for you on Good Friday?" He wants to know if we understand the significance of his prophetic action at the Passover meal. He wants us to realize the meaning of the washing of the feet. As Jesus served, so must we.

While I was in graduate school at the University of Washington, I was weekend priest at St. Matthew Church in Lake City. Back then I asked friends of mine with five daughters in the parish, "What should I tell people on Holy Thursday?" Here are their responses. For Joanne, service is all about bending:

Holy Thursday – the image of washing someone's feet. We romanticize it sometimes, it's all nice and holy to serve. We don't often talk about the fact that being of service requires one to bend – again, think of the image of washing feet; Jesus has to bend over to do so. As a mom I bend over a lot – to pick up heavy children over and over again – I bend down to pick up toys off the floor, clean up messes, pick up laundry, remove the puppy's teeth from some household object she is chewing. It is not romantic and I am certainly not thinking I am "washing feet" in those moments. So on Holy Thursday, I would like to be affirmed in all the bending we do as parents, employees, friends, in order to be of service. Compared to the ritual we envision on Holy Thursday, we don't often connect those moments with holiness or service in the name of Christ, but they are. And even more comforting is the fact that Holy Thursday reminds us that Jesus – our God – knows what it is like to bend over; he knows what it is like to strain your back to serve, to love someone else freely. Jesus knows it is hard work and that we need encouragement – so enter the Eucharist.

Jim focused on the table lesson of Holy Thursday: *If you ask me, Holy Thursday is about the communal act of breaking bread. Like Jesus called us to do, we come together to break bread. I'm one who often reflects on the Last Supper and who was sitting around the table. Who do we invite to sit at our table? Would Jesus sit with immigrants? Would Jesus sit with people of different races, political preferences, sexual orientations? Do we truly embrace Christ's call to communal bread breaking? Are we disciples if we do not embrace our community? How can we fulfill God's call as humbly and selflessly as Christ did, without any agenda?*

Makes a lot of sense to me. (I might add their five girls all had summer jobs working as orderlies in the nursing home down the street, to which Jim and Joanne bring Eucharist each Sunday). Holy Thursday is about Eucharist, giving thanks together, calling one another to self-sacrificing service, and then coming together to the table of the Lord to receive food for the journey. We both wash one another's feet and feast together. Jesus calls us to wash one another's feet. The gift of his body and blood is food that nourishes our loving works of service to one another.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor