

## Evening Mass of the Lord Supper

April 5, 2012

“What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later.” And it was only the beginning of what would turn out to be the slow disappearance of familiar human experience during the course of three days. As we move through the mysterious contours of this Triduum we will find ourselves slipping slowly away from the fragility of time and history. For tonight is the prelude to the handing over in the garden with a kiss. Tonight is the preface to the dead night silence of the cross. Tonight is the portal that leads to the empty tomb, the angel, the linens scattered. The time for words is over. This evening of the Lord’s Supper encompasses gestures and feelings too great for human language. The giving of the bread as his body. The cup poured out for us as his blood.

And the strangest of divine actions: the washing of feet. There is a sign that could never be captured by words. Feet are ugly, don’t you think? In ancient culture they would be dirty too, and their washing fit only for a servant. Only a radical host would ever lower himself, quite literally, to wash feet. Or a host capable of radical hospitality. No wonder Peter yelled, “You will never wash my feet!” Such a lavish gesture upsets our apple cart, our hierarchy of the way we think things should be. Yet it is at the juncture between the human and the divine, encountering the God who stoops to save that we find the doors of graced hospitality, the gateway to the Holy.

In his service at table, Jesus is recalling the Father’s love, present from the beginning of time. God’s generosity has been there from when there was nothing, made definitive in the Incarnation itself. Christ was born to be a servant, to give his life as a ransom on the edge of this night and to wash feet. Servant ministry is impossible to imagine without coming back to this moment: the defining act of service in humble self-giving and surrender and intimacy with the Lord.

The deacon wears the dalmatic – the ancient, special tunic that is associated with the ministry of service – vested in an apron for the people of God. That apron of service never comes off, but gets only more and more messy with service for God's people. Our vocation to ministry is first and foremost a union with Christ the Servant. The apron of ministry will get very dirty from our service at table. Our service at the altar of God is inseparably linked to service for our sisters and brothers. And Jesus finally surrenders the apron of service for the nakedness of the cross.

This is a night with few words. We only have a memory. Tomorrow we will lie flat on the ground because without Christ there is, in the end, nothing. Jesus washed our feet first with water and then with his own blood. This is the night when the bread and the cup were forever transformed, transfigured and transubstantiated into our divine manna for our journey through the desert. This is the memorial of the act of divine humility that asks only that we do the same. What we do now is in remembrance of him who remembered us into this moment. Let us wash each other's feet and sit down with him to eat and drink. With gratitude for God's unfathomable love.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor