

Holy Thursday Prayers

Welcome

1. Welcome to all
2. Opening of the Three Days: all connected
3. Opportunity to reflect on Eucharist and on salvation.
4. Also, a chance to recognise our roots. Tomorrow evening is the Eve of Passover in the Jewish Calendar and Saturday is Passover Day.

In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt, since it is said, And you shall tell your son in that day saying, it is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt (Ex. 13:8). Therefore we are duty-bound to thank, praise, glorify, honour, exalt, extol, and bless him who did for our forefathers and for us all these miracles. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, mourning to festival, darkness to great light, subjugation to redemption, so we should say before him, Hallelujah. (Pesachim 10:5)

Opening Prayer

O God,
in the fullness of time you revealed your love
in Jesus the Lord.
On the eve of his death,
as a sign of your covenant,
he washed the feet of his disciples
and gave himself as food and drink.
Give us life at this sacred banquet
and joy in humble service,
that, bound to Christ in all things,
we may pass over from this world to your kingdom,
where he lives with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Offertory Prayer

Lord God,
make us worthy to celebrate this holy eucharist,
for as often as this sacrifice is offered
in remembrance of your Son,
the work of our redemption is accomplished.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface

It is truly right and just,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
He is the true and eternal priest,
who founded this memorial of his unending sacrifice.
He gave himself to you as victim for our deliverance,
and commanded us to make this offering in his memory.
As we eat his body, given for us,
we grow in strength.
As we drink his blood, poured out for us,
we are washed clean.
And so, with angels and archangels,
with all the heavenly host,
we proclaim your glory
and join their unending chorus of praise:

Communion Prayer

Almighty God,
the supper that your Son left us this night
sustains our life on earth;
grant that our hunger may be fully satisfied
in the everlasting banquet of heaven.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Donnybrook: Holy Thursday

The 14th of April 2022

Welcome

We have heard the Gospel of the washing of the feet and we have contemplated a re-enactment. You might wonder what could be plainer than the message of the washing of the feet? Perhaps in the back of our minds, we have one of these remarkable pictures of Pope Francis washing the feet of people in a hospital or in a jail in Rome. As a sign of sincere humility, the Bishop of Rome not only washes their feet but kisses the the instep of each person. Of all the titles borne by the bishop of Rome, surely the most eloquent is *servus servorum Dei*.

Topic

Could there be more to it, if we looked more deeply? I believe there is and in a way which can help us directly today, both as individuals and as a community of faith.

Steps

There are, as you know, four accounts of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. The earliest of these is in the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, as we just heard. The other three are in the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. There is no Lord's Supper in the gospel of John. Instead of the Lord's Supper, John offers us the washing of the feet. It is clear enough in Paul, Mark, Matthew and Luke that the Lord's Supper interprets the destiny of Jesus: this is my body given, this is the blood of the covenant. A profound meaning is given to his death: it will be part of the new covenant and it would be for us. Using a very different gesture, in John's Gospel the washing of the feet also interprets the destiny of Jesus, pointing beyond the obvious moral example to something deeper.

We can see this from this evening's Gospel in two ways. In the opening paragraph, we heard the important words "he always loved those who were his own in the world but now he showed how perfect his love was." In our translation, it says he got up from the table and removed his outer for a garment. In the original Greek, the words used are freighted with meaning. It does not say he got up and removed but rather he rose and laid down. These are the very words used in this gospel to speak of Jesus laying down his life and rising to new life.

This is part of a bigger picture. Tomorrow, we will hear the Passion according to John. A summary of that Gospel's teaching might put it like this: the creator God has healed humanity of death by sending his Son in an act of self-emptying and loving service setting us free from the power of sin and death. God's loving therapy is a new Passover and a new creation enacted in us by the Holy Spirit.

If this all-too-compact summary is true then it quite different picture comes into focus. In the tradition we were taught to think of Jesus' death as a price paid to an angry God for Adam's sin. John's gospel teaches the diametrical opposite. Instead, Jesus' death is the disclosure of the astonishing love of God who has come to serve us no less, a breath-taking reversal of roles. This is an extraordinary claim to make about God and one made only by the Christian faith. Only the Christians are saying that God came this close to us in fragility, suffering and death to disclose his breath-taking love. Hence the deeper meaning of he washing of the feet.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer three considerations.

Firstly, a church which fails to serve or which serves itself is not just failing to follow the good example and command of Jesus himself. More radically, it is failing to get to the very heart of salvation itself, which is God's loving service and serving love. Conversely, a church which serves offers the world the extraordinary message at the heart of the Christian proclamation.

Secondly, at this moment in time, we have begun our synodal pathway, a chance to reset the compass of church. No one should underestimate the potential of what we are doing. As we step into the new and the unknown, we need to recall that this is not first of about church but first of all about the Gospel, the Good News of what happened for us all in the great events that give us new life in Christ. With this clearly in focus, we can go on to dream how we should be as a community of faith so as to bring the word of life to life in our own day.

Thirdly, and perhaps more personally, every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we commit ourselves to recognising the body, in the language of St Paul. We commit ourselves to mutual service, not just because this a noble ideal or a moral command. Rather, whenever we recognise the body and commit ourselves again to each other in loving service, we are living again the events that took place for us in Jesus' death and resurrection. We are doing nothing less! And it *is* wonderful!