

Well here we are – here to celebrate Holy Thursday, the beginning of the Triduum and unarguably the holiest time of our year. The images and symbols are rich - it is for this that we have journeyed through Lent.

We began with the story of God speaking to Moses and Aaron of how to prepare with the marking of the blood of a lamb that has been sacrificed. God saying: “This shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; through your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.” And here we are remembering, celebrating... Jesus has become that sacrificial lamb.

Paul, in only a few lines telling the story of what we now call the institution of the Eucharist. He uses the words “this is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” “This cup is the new covenant in my Blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And then the Gospel which is John’s story of the Last Supper. We are all aware of the usual depiction of the Last Supper – that of the apostles seated at a long table with Jesus at the centre. But tonight John offers us another image, one that is quite different than that of men and women seated at a table sharing bread and wine. Rather it is the image is of a man kneeling at the feet of those who follow him, to wash the dirt from their feet. Such love is there that Jesus, son of God, would get on his knees to wash the feet of his beloved.

William Barclay describes these actions of Jesus as being” the Royalty of Service”. I want to call it the Sacrament of Service.

Normand Bonneau, describes how the readings from this evening tie in with the readings that we will hear tomorrow at our Good Friday liturgy and then at the Easter Vigil – each intricately tied to and a part of the other.

Normand states that [Jesus’ action of washing his disciples feet] “...serves as an enacted parable of Jesus loving his own to the end, for the words used to describe Jesus taking off his outer garment (v.4) and then putting it

on again (v.12) are the same words spoken by the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, only to take it up again (John 10:17)”

This washing of the feet was a mark of hospitality, of seeing to the welfare of others, a job which in those times would be performed by at least a servant but more likely a slave. This is the ultimate mark of love – to serve others – just as God does with each of us.

Ron Rolheiser, in his Daily Lenten Reflection video for today tells us that the Eucharist is meant to send us out into the world “ready to give expression to Christ’s hospitality, humility and self-effacement. [...] to lead us out of the church and into the humble service of others. [...] to move from worship to service – to take the nourishment, the embrace, the kiss that we have just received from God and the community and translate it immediately and directly into the loving service of others.”

Ron adds: “To take the Eucharist seriously is to begin to wash the feet of others, especially the feet of the poor.”

It is through loving service that we will follow and model Jesus and how we shall come home to the Father.

And lets not forget Peter’s response to Jesus when he says “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and head” and Jesus responding that is not really needed because he is already clean. This is seen by some as a reference to Baptism which is a promise, a commitment to imitate, and model our lives on Jesus as he serves others – a self-giving which does not end in his dying because we are promised that we will be “raised with him”.

Incredibly rich images.

I remember the first time I felt that I was called to “serve those who serve others”. I was not entirely comfortable with the sound of that. It can get dirty and is usually hidden, this doing of the little things, sometimes messy and difficult, certainly unrecognized. But there can be great joy in doing that for our brothers and sisters – for each other. Watch the faces of those who will be washing the feet of others in just a few minutes from now.

These are the faces of love and joy. A little thing - becomes so very huge – all from what I dare say is a magnificent love.

Tonight is our entrance into an ongoing living Paschal Mystery – it is the beginning which will carry us through to Pentecost, a time of death and resurrection, of letting go of the old so to make room for the new. It all begins here with the Eucharist of the Washing of The Feet.

Authorities:

Exodus 12.1-8, 11-14

1 Corinthians 11.23-26

John 12.1-15

William Barclay – The New Daily Study Bible – The Gospel of John, Volume Two

Norman Bonneau, OMI – The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape, 1998

Ron Rolheiser, OMI – Daily Lenten Reflection for April 2, 2015