

## Holy Thursday +++ 2019 by Fr. Phil Horrigan

**Tonight, my friends**, we have begun a great feast. Like our Jewish and Christian ancestors in faith traditions over many centuries we are done with fasting and waiting, and we have come to the table of word and sacrament, in a place where the evening light announces a new beauty and a new time.

**It is a feast with the one** who said so long ago: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you”.

**It is a feast of ancient rituals, like** the slaughter of a lamb, of families standing at table to eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs, with sandals on and a staff in hand prepared for a great journey of faith.

**It is a feast** where a revered teacher washes the feet of his disciples, during supper;

**It is a feast** where a loaf of bread, a cup of wine, a basin, a towel and a pitcher of water take on powerful meanings.

**It is a feast** that will involve a humble reverence of the wood of a cross; a feast where a great fire and a magnificent pillar of wax will break the darkness of our world.

**This is a feast of** stories and mystery, of how an empty tomb and a font filled with water both speak of new life, of hope and salvation.

**In fact it will take us three days** to consume and to celebrate the riches of the Paschal Mystery; the last moments of Christ’s earthly life, - the culmination of his mission, of all those moments of healing and passion, of love and teaching that even now give shape and meaning to every facet of our lives.

**We have gathered here because we have been told to do this:**

- **In Exodus**, God said to them: “*this day shall be a memorial for you, which all your generations shall celebrate*”.
- **Paul reminds** the Corinthians of Jesus’ command: “*do this in remembrance of me*”.
- **And in John’s gospel**, Jesus tells the disciples, “*I have given you an example to follow, so that as I have done for you, you shall also do*”.

**Tonight** we cross the threshold of the feast; tonight we embrace the very heart of our faith, faith in a God who will not give up on us.

**Tonight** we accept with both humility and unbounded joy the love of a savior who embarrasses us with gestures of feeding and service.

**Tonight** we commit ourselves once again with every fiber of our being to a life centered on a cross, nourished at a table and poured out for us.

**This night began for us a long time ago**, - in the story of Exodus. A great and wonderful God, our God, who instructed a chosen people to celebrate their identity and their freedom with a festive and memorial meal.

**Centuries later, at another meal** where this tradition was kept alive, **an astonishing thing takes place**: the one who said he was from God knelt on the floor of an upper room in an ordinary house and washed the feet of his friends.

**The seven verbs** in John's gospel paint a picture in slow motion:

- He rose from table – already an image of resurrection ;
- He takes off his outer garment – he lays down his tunic, like a shepherd who lays down his life;
- He takes a towel: as he will take bread and wine, the sacramental symbols of his love;
- He tied it round his waist: a gesture of gathering all things to himself;
- He poured water into a basin: and he will pour out his blood for our salvation;
- He washed their feet: what we could do ourselves, he does for us;
- He dries their feet: a gesture of love that is both tender and embarrassing, - but every detail fulfils his desire: **he loved them to the end.**

**But this Last Supper**, this final meal of Jesus **must be understood** in light of all the other meals in Jesus life.

**He ate with those** who were in, and those who were out, and he was condemned for doing so.

**When he ate with folks they were transformed**, - like **Zaccheus**, the little guy with the big heart.

**When he ate with folks** there was joy and festivity, - the wedding feast of **Cana**.

**When he ate** with folks there was **healing**, - at the house of Peter's mother-in-law.

**When he ate** at the Pharisee's house there was compassion, as he forgave the woman who anointed his feet.

**The gesture of washing the feet of the disciples** should not have been such a surprise if they had understood all the other meal events. To be a disciple is to share the table of the teacher, the master...it is also to share his mission. **And so Jesus could say to them**, “unless I wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.” And then ask, **“Do you realize what I have done for you”?** If it was just about washing feet we would all become podiatrists; but it was so much more!

**Does this not mean** unless you welcome the sinner, unless you reach out to the alienated, unless you extend hospitality to each other, especially to the oppressed and the poor, unless you forgive with sincerity of heart, unless you love one another...you can have nothing in common with me.

**To share the common table s to be in communion with creation and creature, with sister and brother, every time, all the time.**

*There is the story of the monk who decided to live as a hermit. After several years he arrived at the door of the monastery and the surprised abbot greeted him and asked, my brother why have you come back to us? And the hermit replied, because I didn't have anybody's feet to wash.*

**Beneath the simple act of foot washing is a profound Eucharistic spirituality:** Eucharist is a both meal and mission, they cannot be separated.

**Tonight**, like the Israelites and the Christians in Corinth we gather to eat for the journey; and like the disciples at the Last Supper we gather to understand **what Eucharist looks like every day.**

**And so we take up a pitcher of water, with a towel as our vestment, for the feet of the world are waiting. This is who we are; and this is what we do.**

Phil Horrigan