

For my first Holy Thursday homily with you three years ago, I remember preaching at the foot of the Sanctuary. I did that because of the clear connection I felt between the action of washing feet and the action that takes place later at the Eucharistic Table, during the Eucharistic Prayer. The Scriptures we have just heard have clear references to both of these. This is indeed one of the more beautiful, even tender liturgies of the year. For some, including myself, it is the most important liturgy of the year. Tonight we celebrate and experience the whole of the Christian life we serve, and we are fed we are fed, and then once again sent out into the world to serve. While both are important and essential to our discipleship, tonight, however, I want to focus our thinking on the action that takes place on the Eucharistic Table. I emphasize the word 'action' that happens on the Eucharistic Table, because what happens on the Table is indeed as much of an action as the more clear action of washing feet.

With this Feast we celebrate the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and also the institution of the priesthood, which is essential to making the Eucharist available within the Church. Both of these, however, have a tendency to make us think of the past. We refer to the Supper that gave us the Eucharist as The Last Supper. And we connect the institution of the priesthood with the same supper, the Last Supper. But I wonder did the disciples know this was the 'last supper'? As they prepared it and ate it, did they know that this would be the final time they would eat and celebrate with Jesus this way?

I think that maybe they did not. We know it to have been such, but how could they have known? For them, it was simply the annual Passover, Seder Meal. They had celebrated this supper with someone each year, and probably for the past couple of years they had celebrated it with Jesus, just like they were preparing to do again. For them it was just that special annual meal in which they would again hear the story we just heard in the First Scripture, and then sing some Psalms about God's goodness and care for all the Israelite people. Only in hindsight do we know that it was indeed their 'last supper' together with Jesus in human form. And, they did not have that hindsight as they were there that night.

In a real sense it was the Last Supper but in a real sense it was also, and at the same time, the First Supper, the First Supper in the Kingdom. Yes, the Last Supper on Earth was the First Supper in the Kingdom. Fr. Eugene LaVerdiere writes: "The Eucharist. The Last Supper. The theological relationship between the Eucharist and the Last Supper is very close, so close that there is no understanding one without the other. But they are not the same" The supper that is our focus tonight is actually two in one The Last Supper before Jesus' passion and death, but also and at the same time the First Supper of the New Kingdom.
Why make a point of this?

Remember a couple of weekends ago, how we considered that we don't need to wait until we actually die to share in the Resurrection of Jesus. that something of the Resurrection is actually available and present to us in the here and now. In the Eucharist we are also given a share in meal and food of the Kingdom. In the Eucharist our food is not Jesus who is suffering; our food is Jesus who endured and overcame suffering and is now in glory with God the Father. Our food is the risen and living Christ. When we celebrate the Eucharist today, we do look back and remember the Last Supper. But in the Eucharist we celebrate today we also look ahead to all that is promised to us in the Kingdom of God. The Last Supper was a single event it was what it was, but it can be no more. The Eucharist is a repeatable event. We can and do celebrate it every day. It is good to remember; but it is essential to anticipate!

Why I think this matters is that it is the difference between thinking of the Eucharist as something of the past that we hold in memory, and thinking of the Eucharist as something of the future, something of promise, and most especially something of the future and promise that we share in even now. What we receive in Holy Communion is the Bread of Life, the Food of the Kingdom. When you process each weekend to the Table of Eucharist for the Bread of Life, do you think more of things past, or do you think more of what is yet to come, what is promised to all faithful disciples?

When you and I come to the Table of the Lord at each Mass we come with eyes on the Kingdom, on what we hope and desire we will one day share in fully:

- we are the poor in spirit, and the Kingdom of Heaven is ours
- we are the meek, who will inherit the earth
- we are those who mourn, and we will be comforted
- we are those who hunger and thirst for what is right and just, and we will have our fill of both
- we are the merciful, and we will receive mercy
- we are the pure in heart, we will see God
- we are the peacemakers, known and recognized as children of God

The Communion procession at every Mass is amazing. It is a long line of those approaching the Table of Eucharist to be fed with the Food of Heaven. It is easy to come forward thinking of the past and that is something we will always do, I'm sure. But it is also important and necessary to come forward desiring the Bread of Heaven. One day when we finally get to heaven, we won't need this Bread.... but until then, we need it to keep alive the promise that heaven is indeed our inheritance. The Communion Procession at any Mass is a procession of hope, and desire, and longing for the fullness of the Kingdom. So, we serve each other, even washing each others' feet, while we are here on earth. But when we gather for Eucharist we gather as people with our eyes and hearts especially forward ... hearts longing to be fulfilled, hands out to receive the Bread that keeps us alive here and at the same time orients us to the future and all that awaits us in the Kingdom. It is indeed an amazing night here for all that we remember and for all that we hope is yet to come. Last Supper First Supper an amazing mystery that we have been given and share with each other here.