

Holy Thursday
3/24/16

After he had washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus took his place at table and explained to his friends the meaning of his extraordinary gesture. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (Jn. 13.1-15) These words not only point to the humble washing of the disciples’ feet. The Lord’s gentle kindness anticipated the washing with his own blood by which the friends of the Lord would gain an inheritance with Jesus, as he had patiently explained to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.”

Jesus’ instruction was more than a call to imitate his example. In the second reading, Paul recalled for the early Christians in Corinth, the words of Jesus on the night before he died, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (I Cor. 11.23-26) These sacred actions -- the washing of the feet, the offering of bread become his body, the giving of cup become his blood – were the ways that Jesus entrusted the mission of mercy to his followers. He was employing human memory for divine purposes.

Memory is a powerful part of the human person. It is also little understood or appreciated. Most of what we know about

ourselves, most of how we act comes from memories. We often think that memory is a mental exercise, an accumulation of mental recordings stored in our heads. In part, this is true but this something more, something wonderfully more to memory. When we remember we do not recall just a stored memory. We recalled a lived event, lived encounters, and the people who have surrounded us. In remembering we are placing ourselves in the story: the history of a nation, the history of a family, our own personal history, or, in the case of today's readings, the history of salvation. This is true about retelling of a memory. It is even truer in the living out of that memory. Personal habits as well as sacramental rituals draw their power from this deep human desire to remember who we are. We remember those with whom we are connected.

So, Jesus' instructions, his heartfelt desire was that we would remember our connection to him. When we do what he has done, washing the feet of others as he did, breaking the bread of our lives as he did, pouring out our love as he poured out the cup of his blood, he lives in us and acts through us. We prolong his mission of mercy and extend his healing hands into the present moment. This is what Paul understood when he said to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2.19-20)

This is the unseen power of the Sacramental memory. It is also the unseen, unimaginable sacramental power of mercy. "What I have done, so you should also do."

We serve in remembrance of his undying charity. We forgive in remembrance of his forgiveness. We heal in remembrance of his healing hands. We feed the hungry in remembrance of the bread of life he shared with us. We come together in remembrance of his call to us. Whenever we do as Christ has done, his saving work continues through us.

We so readily believe this when we break the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation. Believe as well that his smile, his tenderness, and his mercy are transmitted in whatever we do in remembrance of him. His powerful mercy reaches through the centuries of sacramental memory and touches the feet as well as the soul of those he loves because of what we do in remembrance of him.

Therefore, take to heart those words of Jesus to his bewildered disciples. We know now what they could not even imagine. Whenever we do what he has done, Jesus still lives in us.

Holy Thursday Penance Service
3/24/16

The word mercy is hard to explain. It can be hard to define. Pointing to its linguistic origins it comes from the Latin for a price or wage paid. This can seem too transactional, too much like something bartered.

The Spanish translation of mercy is “Misericordia” which is the same in Latin, Misericordia. But the word in both Spanish and Latin has a different origin. It comes from two words Cor, meaning heart, and miseri, meaning poor. This word Misericordia – having a heart for the poor -- brings us closer to the experience of Divine Mercy. The word also reveals who God is for us. He is misericordioso (merciful). He is the one who has a heart for the poor. There is no other god, only the God who has a heart for the poor, the God of Misericordia.

It is hard to explain mercy. It is far better to experience it and then to bring that experience to others. So, Pope Francis’s theme for this Jubilee of Mercy speaks to what we are about this afternoon: To be merciful as the Father. We can only share what we have been given.

To know the God whose heart is for the poor, we must come to him mindful of our poverty, of misery. Or, like the woman in the gospel he comes to us. (Jn. 8.1-11) In his presence, we become

aware of our need for the mercy standing before us, standing with us. Maybe, some of us are here because the merciful voice of the Good Shepherd has called us.

We come now to the one whose heart is for us. His Sacred Heart was pierced for our sake. His heart was opened so that we might enter into his haven of mercy.

May we not only come to know His Misericordia. May he also give us a heart like his so that others may find their way to him.

Good Friday
3/26/16

From the garden Gethsemane to the courtyard of the high priest, to the Roman Praetorium and finally to Calvary, Jesus stood in judgment. He stood defenseless, bound, beaten, scourged, mocked, and humiliated. The ruling authorities of his time looked on with perplexity, disdain, anger and loathing. He was judged, condemned, and crucified. As Isaiah had foretold, he was “like a lamb led to the slaughter.”

While all this transpired and the full weight of the law pressed him down, the roles of these tribunals were inverted. While Jesus was judged by human standards, he was already judging with divine mercy. While scourged, stripped, and nailed, his blood was washing, purifying, and redeeming. While mocked, ridiculed, and despised, he was interceding, reconciling, and forgiving.

Few of those gathered for this bloody spectacle knew of the salvific, judicial juxtaposition that had taken place. Maybe only His mother, His beloved disciple, and the other women weeping at the foot of cross sense that the divine tribunal had been convened, that Jesus was already presiding as the merciful judge from the throne of the cross.

His final judgment was rendered with dying breath, with the flow of water and blood from his pierced sacred heart. From Calvary all the world was judged and redeemed.

Paul captured this moment for us in his first letter to the Corinthians, “We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (I Cor. 1.23-24)

As our planet orbits around the sun, all the events of humanity from the political to the personal revolve around the tribunal of Calvary. We are judged by the mercy of Christ, who is the fullness of God’s justice reveal. May we always be mindful of this merciful mystery brooding over us. May we always act with heartfelt devotion for the Sacred Heart that bleeds for us. Never lose sight of the Lord who looked with longing for us from the cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Easter Vigil
3/26/16
Cycle C

In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us, “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”(Rom. 6.3-11)

These words capture the drama of faith and life celebrated on this night, this holy night.

Like the first disciples we too can be bewildered and uncertain of what “newness of life” means. The women -- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James – were the first to find the empty tomb. Through the message of angels, they remembered what Jesus had foretold to them during his earthly ministry. The gospel narrative recounts how the apostles’ first reaction was disbelief. The story seemed to them like nonsense. Peter went to the tomb, saw only the burial cloths and left amazed. It would take time and later experiences with the Risen Christ for them to believe.

As he had been throughout his ministry, Jesus, newly raised from the dead would be patient with his old friends. He would show them tender mercy. This mercy is what would bring them to embrace their friend in newness of life.

We too should be patient with them as we should be with ourselves for the resurrection of Christ was truly new. It had never happened before. Jesus was not just resuscitated from the tomb like his friend Lazarus. Jesus was resurrected to new life. He did not leave his humanity behind in the tomb. God the Father raised Jesus, human and divine, from dead. This was a new creation, the moment of a new genesis. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary came up from the tomb and would take his place at the right hand of the throne of God. We should take a moment to consider what this means.

Few of us would question that Jesus, the divine Son of God, would overcome death because sin, death, and the devil had no power over him. The love of God the Father would lift his obedient Son from death. In so doing, God in his mercy lifted up Jesus with the same humanity that had shared in his divinity. A humanity with which Jesus touched the sick, forgave the sinner, feed the hungry, proclaimed good news to the poor, and with which he formed deep, dear, and lasting friendships with those he loved.

The resurrected Jesus, with a glorified body, still longed to keep his friends just as much as he longed to return to the Father during this earthly ministry. In some sense, we can say that

Jesus wanted the best of both worlds. With his resurrection, he creates a new world, a new creation, newness of life.

Jesus assumed what was good from what His Father had created in humanity. He restored it, revived it, and redeemed humanity by uniting us with his divinity.

Going back to the resurrection accounts, the women, Simon Peter, and the other disciples were bewildered and confused. The account from Luke tells us the women remembered his words. This would also happen to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They would remember not only his words, but his voice, his touch, his smile. They would remember him because they knew him and loved him. This is why, in the resurrection accounts, only those who knew Jesus would come to recognize him. They had a relationship with him. They were his friends. In the resurrection this relationship continued and deepened. They also began to share in his glorified life, in the joy of the resurrection. In the gospel of John, this is what Jesus had promised his disciples, “that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (Jn. 15.11)

Jesus continues to use human bonds of friendship and love to communicate the power of His Father’s wondrous mercy. This is what we celebrate here in these solemn rituals. The risen

Christ brings us into the new creation. The newness of life is found in our friendship with Jesus. All the sacramental signs as well as our own frail humanity are charged with the divine power of the resurrection so that we may think of ourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus," our Lord.