

MAUNDY THURSDAY – 2009
Food for the Journey

On Tuesday I was in London and between two appointments I decided to drop into Westminster Cathedral. As I turned into the Cathedral square I was faced with people carrying placards. For a moment my heart sank thinking it was some sort of protest, but I was pleasantly surprised to see the placards saying “Thank God for our priests”. Then, as I entered the Cathedral, I found that they were about to celebrate the Chrism Mass at which not only are the oils blessed by the Bishop for use in the sacraments throughout the diocese in the coming year, but also the priests renew their commitment. Our Chrism Mass took place in Northampton this morning and there our oils were blessed and our priests renewed their commitment. And it struck me both at Westminster and here in our own diocese today that without our priests we would not have the Eucharist to nourish and sustain us in our lives. So it is very appropriate that we give thanks for them and their ministry today.

The Eucharist, our Holy Communion, is at the centre of all our readings tonight. But it isn't just about Jesus giving himself to us in love, which is an absolutely mind blowing thought in itself; it is also about how we then share this most precious gift of Jesus with the people we meet every day. For that is what every one of us, priest and people, is called to do.

In the first reading from Exodus, the Lord is telling Moses and Aaron how they are to observe the Passover meal before he rescues them from captivity. It is to be shared. It is to be a meal of pilgrims and refugees; and it is to be a meal in which God's chosen people are identified and protected. And all this, God insists, is to be remembered for all time.

In the second reading, Paul reminds us of the words and actions of Jesus in giving himself to us in the Eucharist that is our Holy Communion. As in the first reading, he says there is a need to remember this, not just once, but for all time.

What is this saying to us today? Well, I suggest that it is calling us to recognise that through our baptism we are now God's people specially chosen for a particular mission in life. Then, to help and sustain us in our God-given task we have the Eucharist – Jesus himself in bread and wine. So, we are chosen, we are missioned - how then do we live out the true meaning of these gifts in our lives ?

The psalm for today has asked us the question "How do I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?" It has also given us the answer – "By giving thanks to God and fulfilling our promises". The questions we might ask ourselves in the light of that are – Do we take time each day to thank God for all that he has given and continues to give us? Do we keep our promises to God and to each other? Are we faithful people? Holy Week, when God's love for us is so powerfully and repeatedly demonstrated, is a good time for asking such questions of ourselves.

In the Gospel of John we are taken a step further. It is in the context of a meal but there is no mention of bread and wine. Instead Jesus takes a towel and washes the feet of his disciples. Just as Fr. Timothy will do for some of you in a few minutes. Jesus becomes a servant. God made man becomes our servant. And in so doing he asks us the question : Do you realise what I have done for you?

In putting that question, I suggest that he is asking each of us to believe and accept that we are chosen simply because he loves us; for no other reason. He has also given us himself for

all time in Holy Communion to nourish and sustain us. And, most importantly, he tells that we must follow his example and do for others what he has done for us.

So who are those in this community who need our Christ-like service, our listening ear and our sensitive touch? Are we willing to seek out and help the poor, the sick, the elderly, the lonely, the bereaved, the addicts, the broken and the vulnerable in our midst – possibly even in our own families? These are the people to whom Jesus reached out and made himself available. If we are to live in memory of him, he tells us, we must do likewise.

So let's think about daily thanking God for his goodness to us. And on this night especially, let us thank him for our priests and for their priestly action which brings Jesus Christ into our midst in the Eucharist and all of us into holy communion. That should give us the courage and the conviction to help those who need us to be Christ-like.

(9.4.09)