

HOLY THURSDAY

April 21, 2011

Tonight we begin the three most important days of the year, three days full of solemn ritual and familiar gestures. Without realizing it, we can regard these three days in the way that young adults of our time would view the days of World War II or the great Depression, when they hear their grandparents tell what it was like, seemingly so long ago and far away.

For Jesus and the disciples, the Last Supper was not merely a gathering to commemorate God's great deeds done long ago and far away, when God brought freedom to the people God announced were special to God.

Jesus looked at his friends through the hard, clear glass of reality. Knowing everything about them, even the things they never talked about, Jesus told them "you must go on".

The things they never talked about but easily were very aware of – Judas's greed; Peter's peculiar mixture of pride, courage, and cowardice; almost any other human failing we can imagine. All these things were part of the disciples in that room, just as much as they are here, in this room, among us and inside us.

Those private sins aren't particularly serious. Many here tonight could point to someone among us and say: "I know what you're really like." "I know what you're most ashamed of." "I know what you never want revealed to the world".

Private sins, like our own, the things we are most ashamed of, are what Jesus saw in the disciples at the Last Supper – in Judas's eyes, as their hands touched a plate of bread that Jesus had made new to be his entire, eternal self; in Peter's eyes, as Jesus handed him a cup of wine, blessed and shared as forgiveness for every repentant sinner.

Jesus knew all this about them, and still he loved them, with the love that we taste and touch when we drink Christ's blood, and eat Christ's body. How do you love someone you know will hand you over to be tortured? How do you love someone with whom you have spent three years, only to hear him say: "Huh? I never knew that man."?

Often enough, I don't find enough of that kind of love in me. I feel the panic and shame of Peter who said, as his Lord began to wash his feet, "No, Lord, this is all wrong. I can't let you do this. And I can't be what you want me to be. I can't do this after your example."

We want to live our lives as Jesus' Church. Jesus sees us as we are now, and Jesus says: "As I have done, so must you do." Tonight we recall that Jesus encourages us, one by one, each of us, to be comforted and forgiven by his body and blood. "You must go on", the disciples are told and so we make the effort.

We want to live our lives as Jesus' Church, and as Father Mike reminded us earlier this month, "we need to do this humbly, aware of our deficiencies". Very shortly, in a ritual that connects us all directly to the Last Supper, Father Mike will wash the feet of twelve people. As a

leader, he will assure those people – and all of us – that we are up to loving as Jesus did, to walking more closely with the Lord.

The Triduum celebration, from Holy Thursday night through Easter Sunday, helps us become reacquainted with how we have come to be here, how Jesus has changed us and our world, and how much more like him we can become when we say “yes” to the invitation, “take and eat; take and drink”.