

## Sermon for Maundy Thursday 2020

The time had come. It was now or never. Since Sunday, Jesus had spent His time in the Temple, witnessing to the Kingdom of God, showing how a Religion of Rules could never come close to a Kingdom of Love --- God's Love for all.

But now, it was Passover evening. He had gathered his Disciples in quiet, in the Upper Room. Tonight, He would teach them the Sacrament of the Eucharist --- the way He would be with them for ages to come. But first, He had to solve the conflict.

The Disciples had been arguing as to whom among them was the Leader, who among them was to hold positions in the coming Kingdom. Now before supper, they should have a servant to wash their dusty feet. Feet that had been in the sand and dirt all day. Sandals did not keep out the dirt.

But there was no servant. One of the Disciples needed to do the task. But no one would. How could you talk about being a Leader, and then agree to wash feet?

So, no one volunteered.

Jesus, stood, took the water and towel, removed His robe, and knelt before each of them, performing the task of a servant. Embarrassment filled the room. And when Jesus had finished, He said: If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

That lesson to be servants has not been well remembered by the church. Over the centuries there has been too much attention to the growing a hierarchy, to choosing leaders, to telling others what they should believe. But we are called by Jesus to be servants --- not only servants to one another, but servants to everyone. A priest is a servant and should be an example of servanthood to his congregation. A bishop is to be a servant to his priests, to be a servant to his Diocese --- but so often clergy see themselves as leaders, as ones in charge. Would it not be wonderful if each of us would work hard to be servants to those in need, to those all around us, to the world?

But Jesus was not finished teaching and loving his Disciples --- not this night, which was going to be His last with them.

Before the supper ended, Jesus took some of the flatbread, Gave Thanks and Blessed it, saying: This is My Body. And then He took the Chalice, the one that was in the centre of the table reserved for the Messiah, and said: This is My Blood

And with these words, Jesus gave us His greatest Gift, the Eucharist, the Mass, the Meal of Christian Brothers and Sisters, His Holy Presence among us.

The Eucharist that Jesus gave us this Holy Night was not just to remember Him. It is far more. In this Eucharist, Christ Himself becomes present with us in all His love and power. As it says in the Epistle to Hebrews, Jesus “ascended into Heaven to stand before the Father” and to offer His Holy Sacrifice for our salvation. When we consecrate the bread and wine, He comes into those elements, so that He is really Present in the bread and wine. The bread has not changed --- He is present in It, just as much as He was present at the Upper Room. In His Risen Body. And in this Eucharist, we can join with Him in offering Him and His Sacrifice to the Father. The Eucharist opens to us the perfect way we can join with Him in worshipping the Father. And then as we receive these Gifts into ourselves, we are receiving Jesus into our hearts with all His Love and Power.

It all began this night, in that Upper Room, in the company of the Disciples. And we join with Jesus every Sunday at the Altar, in offering Him to the Father, in all our Love and Joy. His Body and Blood feed us. His Presence brings us to the Father. In this Blessed Sacrament, we and Jesus become One. And because of Him, we grow in Holiness and Love week by week, year by year.

One day, we will leave our earthly bodies behind on this earth, and in the mercy of God, we will be moved into the Kingdom of God, where we will know the Sacrificial Love and Joy of our Lord, Together with all our sisters and brothers we will join with Him and all the Saints in the Adoration and Worship of the Father, the God of Heaven and all the Universe --- the Adoration that we knew first at the Altar in His Holy Eucharist.

(Fr. Ron Barnes)