

Homily for Holy Thursday

“On the night he was betrayed” Every time we celebrate Eucharist we use those words. Every time we approach that moment when Christ comes to us in bread and wine, we begin by reminding ourselves that Christ did this “on the night he was betrayed.”

Matthew, Mark and Luke are careful to recount to us the ritual details of what Jesus did “on the night he was betrayed.” They tell us of bread and wine, of blessing and breaking, of giving thanks and sharing.

But John in recounting for us the events “on the night he was betrayed” tells us nothing of bread and wine. For instead of telling us what Jesus did, John tells us what it means.

And so “on the night he was betrayed” Jesus was aware of everything. He knew that the end was near. He knew that not only Judas, but also Peter and Andrew, James and Matthew would betray him. They all would abandon him. They would, by their actions, deny him. Jesus knew this was the hour . . . this was the time the work of redemption would happen. And Jesus would approach this hour with a heaviness of heart that he had never known before.

And at that moment when most of us would abandon ourselves to anger and despair . . . when most of us would be so unforgiving for the

hurt and betrayal that was at hand....Jesus did the unthinkable. He bent down and assuming the duty of the lowest of the slaves, he washed the feet of his disciples. He poured out the water not only of service but also of forgiveness. He cleansed and kissed their feet with the love of God that is so profound that it cuts through all our pettiness, all our prejudice, all our anger, all our hurts and all our resentments....

On this Holy Thursday we are called to do two very simple acts. We are called to kneel before Christ in prayerful reverence of the Eucharist and then to kneel before Christ in humble service to our sisters and brothers. And we can never do one without doing the other. For the day we kneel in prayerful reverence before Christ but fail to kneel before Christ in humble service to our brothers and sister, we fail to grasp what Christ and the Eucharist is all about.

“On the night he was betrayed” is tonight. Tonight begins our journey of faith, our passing over from death to life. But it is Christ who marks the journey. Our journey begins in prayerful reverence before Christ but must continue in service of one another. . It is in washing each other’s feet that God’s love cleanses our world of hatred and prejudice, of fear and resentment, of a coldness of heart that knows not the profound love that God showed us on this “the night he was betrayed.”

