

## Holy Thursday

- Do you like receiving gifts from loved ones?
- What a silly question. Of course you do, we all do.
- Gifts, especially from those who love us, are normally well thought-out – they know you well enough to know what you may desire, or even need at that particular time in your life, but you haven't gone out to get it yourself.
- Or they may even be hand-crafted as a real expression of their giving something of themselves in the very gift.
- This evening we are reminded of a selection of the gifts we've received already & the ones we continue to receive when we need them.
- This is the only Mass in the year when we focus on the origins, meaning & the significance of the gift of the Eucharist, as well as the 3 oils that are used at various times of our lives.
- They are about the God who gives what we need at significant times of our lives – when we're made God's children through baptism; when we're strengthened to live life more fully & be instruments of God through Confirmation; when we're struggling with illness or approaching death through the anointing of the sick & dying; & for the nourishment of God's very life to be able to live through all the vicissitudes of life.
- In the sacraments of the church & especially in the Eucharist, God encounters us in tangible & understandable words, gestures & symbols.
- Tonight in this liturgy we celebrate the institution of the very sacrament we are celebrating—the Eucharist – by which God encounters us & feeds us.
- We commemorate the night when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples; on this night we re-enact the washing of the feet as related to us in the Gospel of John.
- This is the part of the Last Supper event that grabbed John's imagination as he wrote the gospel.
- He, unlike the other gospel writers who focused on the meal, was inspired by Jesus' action before the meal that gave the Last Supper its fuller meaning.
- Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe & the Lord of all, gets down on his knees & in an act of love bathes the feet of his disciples.
- It was a most extraordinary event - that washing of feet, but no more extraordinary than the fact that Jesus came from God in human form to show us how precious we are to God, only to be killed for it.
- Bathing the feet of his disciples was an act of reversal—really it should have been the disciples who bathed the feet of Jesus not him their feet.
- But entirely reversing the order of things is precisely what Jesus is about.
- Jesus washed the feet of his companions, his disciples to stress the special bond between them & to show them in a concrete way how he wanted them to live.

- If it was not beneath his dignity to wash their feet then it could hardly be beneath the dignity of the disciples to do the same for others.
- This ministry of service to one another, symbolised in the bathing of feet, is at the heart of the Christian life.
- To be a Christian is to be prepared to kneel down & perform the lowliest of tasks for another - it is to be a servant of others for the sake of Jesus.
- We don't serve our brothers & sisters simply because we are told to do so by Jesus, we don't do it because it might help us to get to heaven; we do it for love; we do it in response to the love shown to us by Jesus Christ & we do it because people need to experience the love of Jesus made manifest through us – in his love, he commissioned us to be instruments of his love for others.
- His words, *Do this in memory of me*, encapsulate so much.
- They mean: celebrate this holy meal as the way I remain with you & nourish & heal you; they mean: wash one another's feet; they mean: love one another; they mean: give your lives in the pursuit of truth & what is right & just; they mean: be prepared to follow Jesus on the Way of the Cross.
- They mean so very many things & yet they mean only one thing, to live the same kind of life that Jesus lived.
- Holy Thursday calls each of us to see the connection between service & hospitality.
- It is all of us as members of the church who are to continue the mission & ministry of Christ within the church & for the whole world.
- Ministry goes deeper than just helping out; it expresses the work by which Christ's mission continues & is basic to discipleship.
- To create the vibrant community that motivates the members of the church & of our parish to grow; they need to serve.
- To be a place of energy & excitement that is irresistible to outsiders, we need to be people who move out of our pews - it is visitors, guests, newcomers & those around us who are served, & by us.
- More importantly, it is through the gifts we receive within these walls that we're motivated to take out & make a good difference to our world & society.
- As baptised members of this church, we are to serve others & one another - because all of us are commissioned to serve in the pattern of tonight's liturgy of washing feet.
- Let us therefore live our lives in memory of him. Let us be people freed from the things that bind us only to earthly concerns to be the proverbial footwashers of those who need to know how God sees them as precious & be Eucharist to others who need to be nourished by something more than what the world can offer, & in the context of war, what they are being robbed-of – the dignity of living in peace.
- The gifts of the sacraments are there for us, but it's up to us to open the gifts & use them for what they were intended.