

Maundy Thursday Homily, March 2018.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Exodus 12:1-14, John 13:1-17, 31-35.



On this night of nights, Jesus gives yet another gift to his people - in the passover meal, he institutes the Lord's Supper. On this night of nights, he has already given so much in the three years before, and on this night, in which, the hours to come will be so

demanding, he gives to us, to his church. "Do this in remembrance of me".

Writing about Communion, Anglican Theologian Gregory Dix wrote:

"Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and every country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance...[people] have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold."

We consider this gift, in just a few of its colours.

Remembrance. We take the bread and wine and remember how it was the Lord's body broken, blood shed. In a way, we take the bread and wine not lightly - for someone's life it represents. It reflects the Word made Flesh, as John begins his gospel, allowed himself to be betrayed, denied, mocked, falsely tried, beaten, flogged, nailed, killed.

In my training in Durham, one of the people in training, Andrew, was becoming involved in reconciliation work connected to Northern Ireland. He had been an army officer and a soldier under his command had been killed while on tour. He was now going to be ordained. He organised a powerful day where there were a number of speakers, and I remember one who shaped me, a Northern Irish man who shared he now wanted to say sorry to the families and soldiers who had come to N.Ireland, to sort out our problems. That they had to leave homes. It opened my eyes to think about all I had grown up with, lived with. I

thought of what my Father went through as a Police officer. I now thought of these 18, 19 year olds who'd never been overseas now in barracks they couldn't go out of, safely. I learned more, I did not take it lightly the sacrifice of others.

Remembrance. Do not take it lightly what the bread and wine represent. Think of a death, yet an agonising one. Of betrayal by one of the ones he shared bread and wine with and whose feet he washed, with whom he had spent three years walked, teaching, sending out to preach. Think of how his own people's leadership not only rejected him but sought to kill him. Read John 18-19 slowly carefully tomorrow and remember.

Parable. What Jesus does is an acted parable - like all parables, Jesus words always draw us to himself the living word made flesh. His breaking of bread and wine - are prophetic gestures: his body was broken, his blood was shed within 24 hours. His actions at the supper anticipated his approaching death.

Yet the meal was part of the Passover. The words he spoke, the dramatic actions, are charged with the ambience of salvation. As Exodus 12 reminded us, Passover when celebrated, points God's saving action in human history to free his people. So Jesus words, are not only about warning his disciples about his coming death, but giving them a way to understand its deepest meaning. That a new covenant is being established in his blood. As in Passover, the blood of the slaughtered lamb spares those who eat and drink, Jesus identifies himself as the lamb of God whose body is broken, whose blood is spilled, to bring salvation and freedom. A new covenant. The disciples we imagine did not understand as they gathered in that upper room - maybe a room as ordinary as this one - but later, after they had seen him risen,

they made the link. Without further commands, this remembrance becomes a regular part of the Early Church life as Luke shares in Acts 2:42-47 - only days or weeks after Pentecost. While Paul, to this new church plant in Corinth, one of the things he shared in his discipling: "what I received from the Lord, I also handed onto you..."

Thanksgiving. Less needs to be said, as it is apparent to us. Church tradition commonly calls this meal Eucharist. As we remember the what, and the why, we are drawn in thanksgiving to our heavenly father. As we approach the bread and wine, as John reminds us, 'Jesus came from God and was going to God', he did it for us. This is where it becomes personal. He is in that upper room, he will be in the garden of gethsemane and he will be on the cross, for you. For everyone else. And for you. Thanksgiving for how he dies to bring you salvation and freedom. As he said in Mark -

"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).

A ransom to set free. He gave his life so you can be free. As we take the bread and wine, a quiet whispered 'Thank you Lord' would not be inappropriate as you receive the bread and wine into your hands.

Well being. There is another meal from the OT which we can consider which gives us further insight why we remember these 24 hours. Leviticus 1-3 lists a number of offerings that Israelites were to offer, and how they were to do it, and in what situations. It is very much like a priests' manual. Burnt offering, grain offering, sin offering, guilt offering. There is one other - in

Leviticus 3 & 7 - known as peace offering, fellowship offering, or well being offering depending on your bible translation. The word is shelem, which is related very closely to the greeting 'shalom'.

It was a offering which could be brought in thanksgiving for blessings from God, it could be an offering as part of completing a vow made before God, and it could be an offering simply as a spontaneous expression of love to God. It was an offering which is striking where the meat of the offering or bread - some is burnt as an offering to God, some goes to the priesthood, the rest goes to the person offering and those gathered with him. It is the only offering where what is offered, much returns to the offeror for them to eat that day or the next with others. So the priests and the layman or laywoman eat it together in the presence of the Lord. No wonder people see echoes of Holy Communion. Some churches say I am a celebrant. But that is not correct as another scholar said - we are all celebrants, we all celebrate what Christ has done. I lead the celebrate, or preside over it. But we all celebrate.

The celebration is about shelem. Peace, well being, fellowship.

Simply, it reminds us, as we celebrate Holy Communion, we are mindful of all the great benefits the Lord has won for us. Sins forgiven. Peace with God, we can boldly come into his presence, peace between us and others - if we are so forgiven, can we not forgive ourselves, and others. Peace within. God is for us and not against us. He cares about our needs, and problems. Fellowship - as Jesus reminds us, he says he will come and live in us by his Spirit. Revelation 3 says if we open the door, he will come in and eat with us. Well being. Simply this makes me think of all the

blessings that come through Christ on the cross as he served you and I. That we are accepted, secure, and shown to be of great value.

So as he sits around that table, on that night of nights, he gives a great gift of the Lord's Supper to us - a gift that is about **remembrance**, we do not take it lightly that someone died for us, about being a **parable** - seeing what it all means, of **thanksgiving** as we grasp more and more deeply what he did and who he did it for, and **well being** - peace with God, fellowship with God, and all the blessings that come through faith.