

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

Maundy Thursday
April 13, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Drink the Cup!”

Any of you who have been involved with schools or colleges know all about graduations. There is a heightened tension that leads up to them. There is a dawning realization that “this is it, school is over, after 12 solid years!” Everyone however seems unaware that not only is this the end of school, but that 90% of these people you will never see again. You all go your own way and move on to a new stage of your life. It is both exhilarating and just a little sad.

Maundy Thursday, the Last Supper is a graduation. The Apostles have been in school for three years. It has been intense. In three years, day and night they have ate, drank, slept and worked the Gospel. Their university has been the roads and hills of Galilee, Samaria and Judea. Jesus has been their instructor, guide, professor and teacher. They have majored in law, covenant, the prophets, prayer, ministry, compassion, the Kingdom of God, forgiveness, healing and casting out demons.

Their books have been parables, the hands on touch of Jesus, on the poor, the sick and the dying, that they have learned the most from, as he made his rounds in this hospital of life.

Now there is only graduation and one final test. Their grade is still to be determined. But they themselves are confident that they have passed all of Jesus expectations with flying colors.

Now Jesus has all of them close around the table. They may think of themselves as disciples and his friends but Jesus thinks of them as the builders of his Kingdom. All his faith, all his teaching, all his hopes rest on them.

On this holy night he gives them three instructions: one to wash the feet, second to eat the bread and third to drink the cup.

The washing of the feet was a daily ritual that was performed in every Jewish household. It was both practical and religious. It was usually performed by servants but by spouses and parents also. Jesus of course turns traditional on its head by the Master washing the student’s feet. It is a lesson. Care for one another.

The second instruction is to eat the bread. Like the Israelites in the desert, bread had a deep symbolic meaning. For the Israelites of old it strengthened them for the journey. For the apostles Jesus was telling them that unless they had ate and drank in all of his teaching they could not succeed. This bread has fine ingredients: love, forgiveness, compassion and prayer. Only when they have digested these could they hope to feed others with Christ’s Gospel.

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The third instruction to drink the cup is impart a warning and a prophecy. The cup that Jesus speaks of is the cup of suffering and sometimes even the cup of martyrdom. “Drink the Cup” means to accept the cost of discipleship for the sake of the Gospel and the Kingdom. It is not easy. Jesus teaches his Apostles to embrace ridicule, abuse, imprisonment and pain.

“Drinking the cup” is not just putting up with suffering in silence. “Drinking the cup” is to turn hate into love, abuse into kindness, pain into forgiveness.

Jesus’ keynote words are addressed to us tonight. Wash the feet, eat the bread, drink the cup.

In 4 weeks time we will send two of our own Apostles out for Evangelism training. They too will graduate and return to teach. They will produce a Blue Print for growing the parish that will include invitation, greeting, welcome, integrating and all the dynamics of Evangelism as gift.

Bringing Evangelism home to the parish is as important as anything else we are involved with as a church.

The three instructions wash, bread and cup could well be the symbols of Evangelism.

Tonight we celebrate those first Evangelists and we pray for our new Evangelists, praying: “Inspire your people Lord with joy of your Gospel, the nourishment of your bread of life, the cup of your salvation. May they unite us as your family around this time of your Last Supper. May they bring us to your Kingdom. May they bring others to you in welcome.” All this we ask through Christ our teacher at the table of his love.

Amen+