

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

Maundy Thursday
April 5, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“One Bread/One Body”

Maundy Thursday is a special day in the Christian calendar. It is the day we celebrate the Last Supper, and the instituting of the Eucharist. It is called Maundy Thursday because Maundy was a small purse of coins given by a monarch to the poor on this day. The number of people receiving depended on the Kings age. The amount they received was one guinea for each year he had reigned. Maundy money is still given out today.

You have to remember that Lent as a season was always linked with doing Penance, austerity and alms giving. To give to the poor did not just benefit the poor, but it also linked the giver with the ministry of Jesus, who reached out first to the poor and lowly. It is as if how we treat the poor, is a measure of how faithful we are to the teaching of Christ.

The Last Supper is important because it completes a cycle; God had first saved Israel as a people on the night of the Passover. On that night the Israelites were instructed to eat a meal of lamb and wild herbs, standing up, and ready for a great journey.

Everything that we read about in the Gospel tonight about the Last Supper does not speak of an end, but of a beginning. It is not a meal where Jesus is saying “goodbye”, rather it is a meal where he is “preparing”, them for something great that is about to begin.

The Last Supper is an inaugural meal, and it begins in a strange way. Jesus takes off his robe, downs an apron and begins to wash his disciple’s feet. For every year of his pontificate John Paul II washed the feet of 12 homeless people from the streets of Rome in the same manner.

This year in his Easter greeting to the clergy and people of the Diocese, Bishop Paul writes that he hopes these three days will e full of God’s grace for every family in the Diocese. At the same time he begs us to remember the people of Kajo-Keji, who still struggle in poverty but have to be the most obvious and visible sign of Resurrection in that although there schools, churches, and houses have been destroyed by the evils of war, they have grown in faith and refused to die as family, church and community. In that regard they are everything that Christ’s church should be. Tonight they will gather as we do to celebrate the Last Supper and Eucharist.

They still will have no roof over their heads, just the great village tree and the stars, but when their Bishop and priest say the words: “This is my body; this is my blood,” they know that they are indeed the Body of Christ with Jesus in their midst.

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Tonight is all about coming together as a family and as a church. It is important because it symbolizes our unity and more, it is the source of our strength. From this act around the altar, we get the strength to go out and serve God's people, whether that be the poor, the prison, the hospital or Evangelism.

We receive the bread of life, just as the Israelites did in the desert. In breaking and in the sharing of bread together we gain a strength that we could not have individually.

Ultimately, it is through the bread, that Christ brings us the gift of himself. In receiving it we become transformed, we become spirit filled. For all of us who try and fail so often in life, that is a great consolidation. Through Christ's death and Resurrection this bread and wine is transformed and we with it.

With it, we become empowered by the Spirit so that anything is possible, be it the growth of Christ's church, ministering to the poor, or healing a brother or a sister.

Let tonight's Eucharist remind us that we cannot take either the Eucharist or the Spirit for granted. A flashlight is only a useful tool if you turn it on. The Eucharist and the Holy Spirit will only be active in our lives, if we turn ourselves on to the power and gifts that Christ promised all who took up the command: "come follow me, feed my lambs, Feed my sheep."

Let us pray:

Father your Son gave us this gift of himself that we might serve one another. Unite us around this bread the whole year through; unite us with those we have lost that our hearts may be one.

Thank you Father, fill us with your Spirit.

Amen+