

Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Tonight, we begin the Triduum, the three days of Jesus' Passion and death. However, in a sense we have been building to this throughout the season of Lent. Tonight, we just begin the climax of the journey.

Many people think of Christmas as the most important celebration in the church year. While the birth of Jesus is important, I would argue that Easter is far more important to our spiritual life. All living creatures have a birthday, a day on which life begins. In that sense, there is nothing spectacular about the birth of Jesus, no matter how many people showed up to celebrate the event.

Resurrection is a much more unique event. The Resurrection of Jesus is the critical event in our religion that sets Christianity apart from all other religious traditions. The person we look to as the beginning of our religion is the only one not remaining in the grave. But to get to the Resurrection, Jesus had to go through a very dark time - the Triduum.

On this day, we remember the beginning of that experience for Jesus and the disciples. In our Gospel reading, we see them at table, enjoying a meal. Jesus interrupts the proceedings by leaving His place at the table and taking on the role of a slave, washing the feet of those gathered. Of course, Peter objects, as he does whenever Jesus breaks the social norms of the day, but Jesus insists stating that we all must be willing to humble ourselves and do the unexpected.

Although we don't see the actual meal taking place in John's version of the story, we know from the other gospels that Jesus also institutes the Eucharist at this final meal with His closest friends. In addition to these two rituals, Jesus prepares His followers with a lengthy discourse on their future. From this, we learn how we are to continue our lives in the post-resurrection era. Most important of these instructions is the new commandment Jesus gives them as they are leaving dinner - to love one another.

Jesus knew rough times were ahead for the disciples. He also knew that the only hope they had of surviving was to support one another through love. Through the centuries since that time, the Church has also gone through some rough times. However, the Church has survived because we have remembered this new commandment - to love one another. It is only through our love for each other, and those around us, that we can not only survive, but thrive.

As we experience the next three days, let us remember that love. Jesus showed it to us in the extreme of Good Friday, carrying His love for us to the cross. He showed it as He lay in the tomb, in utter darkness. And, in the earliest hours of the third day, Jesus showed His love for us as He broke the bonds of death and rose to greet us on that first Easter morning. Our love for one another is grounded in the experiences Jesus endured these three days. As we move through

these days, let us remember that love and share it with those with whom we come in contact. As Jesus said, they will know we are His followers by our love.