

**HOLY THURSDAY - 2006**  
***“In Remembrance of me”***

Jesus longed to eat this Passover meal with his disciples. He knew it would be his last supper with them. He must have thought about it for a long time - what he would say, what he would do. He had so much he wanted to tell them. And it all had to be done in the context of this special meal. He knew they wouldn't sense anything different until he took the bread, held it in his hands and then identified himself with it. *“This is my body,”* he would say. *Take and eat.”* That would catch their attention. And when, near the end of the meal, when he took a cup of wine and identified himself with that, their jaws must have dropped in utter amazement. *“This is the cup of my blood. Take and drink.”* And when he would command them, *“Do this in remembrance of me,”* he knew that they could not have imagined how important this supper was going to be in their lives in the future. It was the Last Supper of the old covenant, but the First Supper of the new. He had so much to say, but he knew he had to say it in the context of the Eucharist. It was critical that they remember.

Interestingly, while Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us about the institution of the Eucharist, St. John in his gospel doesn't mention it at all. And yet, the discourse he gives during the Last Supper is the longest discourse of Jesus in the bible. And during that discourse, Jesus doesn't even mention the Eucharist. He had already spoken of that during his ministry, making it clear that the bread and the wine he was to identify himself with would be truly his body and blood, real food and real drink. Jesus had other things he had to say at the Last Supper, things his disciples had to remember if they were to follow in his footsteps. And the Eucharist would be the key to their remembering.

And the first thing he wanted to say was not said so much with words but with his actions. He got on his knees and washed the feet of his disciples, yes, even the feet of Judas. Of all the things he had to say, he did this first. Why? Well, I have a theory, but first, what were the other things Jesus wanted his disciples to remember when they broke bread, when they took the cup and drank? Listen to these amazing statements, these familiar words of Jesus, spoken at the Last Supper; and see their connection to the Eucharist.

*“Having loved his own in the world, he loved them to the end.”*

Jesus never stopped loving us. And he continues to love us as individuals and as a community in the Eucharist. The Eucharist will not let us forget the gift of God’s love.

*“Whoever receives you, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.”*

In the Eucharist, we don’t just take Jesus into us, he takes us into himself. We enter into the flow of God’s love. In receiving Jesus, we receive also the Father and the Holy Spirit.

*“I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you.”*

In the Eucharist we renew the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and are invited to offer ourselves in union with Jesus to the Father. That would be meaningless unless we overcome our selfishness. The Eucharist empowers us to live selflessly, to love as Jesus loved.

*“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*

Unless we live in union with Jesus we will lose our way. We will search endlessly for meaning in life. The Eucharist deepens our relationship with Jesus, the way, the truth and the life.

*“If you love me, you will keep my word, and my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home with you.”*

At Mass we break open God’s word to prepare our hearts to be the dwelling place of the Divine. What an extraordinary thing: To think that God would dwell in the likes of us! Such is the gift of the Eucharist. How could we ever forget it!

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”*

This peace is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts as well as the bread and wine, and we become instruments of peace to one another and to the world.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches.”*

Cut off from Jesus we die. The Eucharist is Jesus. What better way is there to be one with him? What better way to see we belong to each other as well? We must remember this.

*“May my joy be in you and your joy be complete.”*

We celebrate the Eucharist at weddings and funerals, at times of happiness and sorrow, good times and bad. And yet, we can sense a deep joy in both. Extraordinary!

*“You did not choose me, I chose you.”*

It is all gift, and the Eucharist makes that clear. Jesus is honored by our presence at his table.

*“May they be one, Father as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us so the world may believe you sent me.”*

Only the Eucharist can hold us together as a church. It is the source of our unity. Without unity, the world has reason to laugh at us, and does.

*“Father, as you have sent me into the world, I send them into the world.”*

*“Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”* What a shame that people who leave church early skip this critical moment of the Mass. They have forgotten that they are called by Jesus to bring his love and peace to their homes, their places of work, to all their relationships. And we are all poorer for it.

As I say, Jesus had a lot to say at the Last Supper. So why did he wash the disciples’ feet before he said these things? I think it is this. Unless we humble ourselves before one another, unless we, in some way, take the stance of servants to one another, unless we see all others as our equals, we won’t be able to love one another as Jesus has loved us. If we think that we

are superior to others, that we have a right to treat anyone as a subordinate, we can't live in the spirit of Jesus, who emptied himself to take the form of a slave. And this goes for priests, bishops, executives of any kind; presidents, senators, members of congress, or even generals and admirals. A mother must be humble before the child in her womb, and even a guard in charge of a prison cell. Yes, they may all be in positions of power, but the people over whom they have power have us much dignity as they have, as much a right to life and respect as anybody. Only those who can see this can love as Jesus loves. And it is only this kind of love that can overcome oppression of the poor, prejudice against the different, abuse of the weak, and violence against the innocent. And the Eucharist reminds us of this, for around this table we are not only one, we are equals. We may have different roles, but we are all equal.

Who said that Christianity wasn't radical? It challenges us to our core. It is not about following policies, guidelines or rules, as helpful as they may be. First and foremost, it is about following Jesus and his way of doing things.