

HOLY THURSDAY 2018

There is energy as we gather here tonight. We have a sense of excitement and a sense of solemnity. We feel the mystery of a night that is different from every other night of the year.

Lent is over, and the Sacred Triduum begins – a single celebration of our Lord’s passion, death, and resurrection celebrated over these next three days.

our images, our symbols for tonight are rich. A young lamb ... bread and wine ... pitchers ... bowls ... towels. We make many associations.

We hear stories of Passover, of Eucharist, of service. We gather, we wash feet, we break bread, we share a common cup.

All these images, all these stories, all these actions focus our attention, focus our gaze, focus our hearts on the person of Jesus Christ.

On the Passover night, Jesus gathered together with his friends. The night before he died was a night of memories, of stories, and it was a time to leave a legacy.

As Jesus and his apostles gathered that night, they remembered the Passover, the freedom, the liberation, the saving power of a God who intervened dramatically, a God who removed oppression, a God who delivered them from their enemies.

They likely told the story of that profound final act of God that produced Israel's freedom from captivity in Egypt.

Maybe they recalled how Moses had demanded his people's release, and Pharaoh's obstinacy resulting in nine horrifying plagues.

Water becoming blood; frogs, lice, flies, and locusts have been sent; and people afflicted with boils.

Finally, the devastating death of the first born.

But Israel will be spared by following the directions offered in our first reading. God will "pass over" the homes of the chosen people marked with the blood of the lamb.

For us tonight's story and mystery and legacy are centered on Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God – who dies for all people for all time.

The one who came to take away the sins of the world and to leave us the gift of his body and blood in the form of bread and wine.

Our second reading this holy night is from St. Paul's letter to the growing community in Corinth. It is believed that Paul stayed in Corinth longer than he stayed in any other city, and his letters reflect an intimacy and familiarity with the life and concerns of the people to whom he writes.

Here during a narrative addressing issues of the liturgical assemblies in Corinth, Paul offers us the earliest description of how the eucharist was instituted.

This description which ties together past, present, and future, recounts our Eucharistic practice to this day.

When we receive Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist, we share in his love and in his life.

We can receive him with love; we can receive him with indifference; we can receive him with distraction; we can be too busy to receive him at all.

But for those who open the door of their heart to him, he is there for us.

When we eat his flesh and drink his blood, he abides in us and we in him. We become the Body of Christ, alive in the world in every age.

And as the Body of Christ we do what Jesus did. We empty ourselves in service to one another and the world. "Do this in memory of me"

The church sees in these words the beginnings of the ministerial priesthood. Jesus commissions his apostles to carry on his life and his work in the world.

That is why, on this night, priests from the Pope on down repeat the ritual of the washing of the feet, as a reminder of the essence of their vocation. Priests are called to serve.

So, Fr Rob in a few moments will wash the feet of selected members of our community – some of whom will be baptized and received into the church Saturday night at the Vigil.

Of course, the call to serve is not just a mandate for the clergy.

Jesus envisioned a community of people who would wash each other's feet. He said very simply: "as I have done, so you must do."

When we raise our children in moral values of prayer and worship and concern for others, we live out that legacy of service.

When we take care of the sick, the suffering, the homeless, we live that legacy of service.

When we share our time and our talent even though it costs us dearly, we live that legacy of service.

Tonight, tomorrow, and the Easter Vigil are to put it simply one great feast of love.

Passover, Eucharist, Service - we hear the stories, we share the memoirs, we become part of the mystery.

We remember; we celebrate; we believe!