

Homily - Holy Thursday - 14th April 2022

Our lives are shaped by words and actions that really matter but, on the other hand, a well-chosen set of words at a poignant moment can also leave a permanent mark on our conscience; on our memory.

Tonight, at the start of the Easter Triduum in the Year of Our Lord 2022; we take note of the actions and words of Jesus of Nazareth at the upper room in Jerusalem while partaking in the Passover Meal the night before his arrest, trial, way of the cross and crucifixion. Remember it is the apostles who attended that Passover, that Last Supper, who recorded for posterity the action and words of Our Lord and Saviour. Not many can recite or remember per se all the actions and words of Jesus, however the immanence of sacrifice and death also make those final hours even more prominent; just as we can often recall the final hours and moments of those we love dearly before they departed from this world.

In terms of actions, what struck the twelve vividly was Jesus' decision to kneel down in their presence and wash their feet. An intimate action of love and humble service to his apostolic friends. The same Jesus who was hailed a few days earlier as the Messiah, the true King of the Jews, was now on ground, bending over his apostles and tenderly washing their feet. In upper circles a task reserved to slaves and obedient servants; now being administered by the Son of God.

Why did he do this? Firstly, to remind them of his love for them. Secondly of their own call to a life of service. Thirdly to see it as a symbolic act of cleansing before sharing in the Passover Meal. The world and the Church in particular are reminded that the Holy Communion must go hand in hand with a life of Service. The Church is first and foremost a mirror of the service of Jesus. Church as Servant of God. Hence Pope Francis is also called, as successor of Simon Peter. 'Servant of the Servant of God'.

The second powerful event of the Mass of the Last Supper, is what Jesus said in the Upper Room. He said these words. "This is My Body", and again, "This is My Blood", "Do this in memory of Me". These are words never heard before in the history of the Passover. Perhaps you can recollect words that were spoken to you, that have left an indelible mark on your memory. Your spouse saying, "Will you marry me?", or the midwife saying 'It's a Girl or It's a Boy', or your dying parent saying on their sick bed, 'I Love You' - I remember my dad saying just before he died, 'I've lived a good life, I've nothing to fear from God'.

When Jesus said these words "This is My Body" "Hoc est corpus Meum" - in Latin. He was declaring to the world; that from after his death and resurrection, through the coming of the Holy Spirit; he will be sacramentally present in the substance of his body and blood, in what still appears to be bread and wine. This is the greatest Divine Gift that the Trinity could bestow upon the world. It means that Jesus is truly present, body, blood soul and divinity in the unleavened bread and cup of wine. Notice that Jesus says, "This is ", not "This will be" or "This was" - It was stated in the present tense; Teaching the apostles in his Holy Name, where they call upon the Holy Spirit and break bread together and use the sacred words of Jesus, then it is solemnly decreed that the body and blood of Jesus is made present. The Ordained hands of a priest with an unbroken chain of apostolic succession going back to the Last Supper has provided the Church with this Sacramental reality.

How wonderful, How beautiful, How miraculous, How biblical is that? The world could have never brought this sacred reality upon itself. It could only have come from God. Let us remind ourselves of Jesus' own words in John 6:51ff "I am the Living bread which has come from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever. The bread I shall give is my flesh and I will give it for the life of the world".

Let us rejoice on this Holy Night that Jesus has left an indelible mark on the World by his words and his actions. Let us remember to listen to what he says and do what he does as Saviour of the World.

God bless you ALL

Canon Jeremy Bath