

Holy Thursday, 2024

(OSF)

On this night Jesus knew that his time was short. He looked at his friends through the hard, clear lens of reality, and knowing everything about them, knowing even the stuff they never talked about, he said: “You have to carry on. Do this in memory of me.”

The stuff they never talked about—their private sins: Judas’ greed, Peter’s pride and cowardice, James and John always wanting first place, and almost anything else we can imagine, were with them in that room, just as they are here in this room, among us and in us.

These private sins are not particularly secret. Who could not point to someone among us and say, “I know what you’re really like. I know what you’re most ashamed of. I know what you never want revealed to the world”?

These “private sins” are what Jesus saw that night in the disciples, saw when he looked into the eyes of Judas as their hands touched passing a plate of bread, saw when he bent down to wash Peter’s feet. What he sees in us when we come here.

But (You know something?) Jesus knew all this, and he **still** loved them, and loved them in a way that is **unimaginable**. How do you love someone who will hand you over to the torturer? How do you love someone with whom you’ve spent three solid years, who says, “Huh? I never **knew** that man”? How do you love people who are so weak that they will literally run away from you because petty people say you are a criminal, dangerous to society?

But Jesus did. He actually did. I guess that may be what puts me so much in awe of him and why I always feel so humbled on this night. Kneeling down washing the feet of these people, I almost feel a sense of panic, like Peter who didn’t want the Lord to

wash his feet: “No, no, this is all wrong. I can’t let you do this. I am so far from what you want me to be.”

We are not up to this kind of loving. Our past tells us that. But Jesus sees into us, our private sins and personal panic, and **still** he says: “You must carry on. I need you to do it. You must be me now. If you are not, then who will be?”

You and I will leave this holy place tonight, and we may even sometimes run away from the call Jesus has given. But he will keep coming after us—the “hound of heaven,” as Francis Thompson puts it. And we must never lose the echo of his words, the sound of his voice, “You must carry on.” “Do this in memory of me,” not just changing bread and wine, but **all that I have shown you**.... Every time we need forgiveness, every time we are alone and afraid, every time we are ashamed, we must hear those words: Remember me; you must carry on.

We all have something within us of the Judas, the Peter, the James and John and Thomas, and all the rest of the pitiful cowards. But we also have something of **the Master** in us—something of **his** love, **his** compassion, **his** willingness to serve, to **lay down his life**. In a few moments we will take his very Body and Blood into our own. It is the most precious gift we have, but one, I fear, we far too often take for granted.

On this solemn night commemorating the first Eucharist, I often repeat one of my favorite quotations about the Eucharist from the great Benedictine theologian, Godfrey Dieckman. You have heard it from me before: “What difference does it make if the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and we are not?” Change we must, and that will bring us the strength we need to live his words: “You must carry on.”