

Holy Thursday
March 20, 2008

Rite Of Reconciliation

It is entirely appropriate on this night when we commemorate and celebrate the great gift of Eucharist that we who are ordained to minister at the altar beg forgiveness for the clerical scandal and Episcopal cover-up that has beset our Church in recent years.

It is appropriate, as well, to ask pardon of God for the continuation of the war in Iraq. We are more than 60 million Catholics in the United States, yet we have not been able to stop this unjust and ever-so-harmful conflict.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

HOMILY

Introduction

The Gospel of John has no account of Jesus' instituting the Eucharist. As you know, the other three Gospels do recount that action of Jesus at the Last Supper but not John. What that Gospel has is the powerful story we just heard of Jesus' bending down before his followers to wash their feet and dry them. It's as if John's Gospel is saying that service and Eucharist are one and the same.

I

So it is beyond sad that this community of Our Lady Queen of Peace finds itself unable to reenact that gesture of humble service on this night when we commemorate and celebrate the humble service that is Christ's Body and Blood given for us.

We are not able to wash each other's feet because the Arlington Diocese forbids us priests to wash women's feet and our community has decided that until that ban is lifted we shall not carry out this ritual for anyone.

(By the way, neither the Baltimore nor Washington archdioceses have such a restriction.)

II

But we must take the symbolism and the reality of this night to another level - otherwise we let Holy Thursday and ourselves be trivialized by small minds.

Before that, however, let me explain why and what I did just after proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus' washing the feet of his followers. Without consulting anyone, not even our pastor, I took it on myself to violate the ban on washing a woman's feet. The person whose feet I just washed is an Afro-Peruvian woman, someone who began life in virtual slavery on a hacienda in her native

country and who now in her eighties is the matriarch of a large immigrant family, members of our parish community. It seemed entirely right and fitting that I do this.

Now to take the symbolism and reality of this night to another level.

The point of tonight's Gospel - the fact that the Church offers us this particular incident for our reflection on this special night - has to do with service: serving one another; serving a hurting world.

In other words this community can celebrate the Bread broken and the Cup shared because of the service we consistently do. Even a quick look at the list of direct service ministries done in and through Our Lady Queen of Peace underscores this point:

Cancer Support Group

Feeding the Hungry - Carpenter's Shelter

Gay, Lesbian Friends and Family

Haiti Committee

Hospitality Committee

Job Bank

Matthew XXV Bazaar

Orphans of AIDS in Africa

Visitation Ministry

W. Green Scholarship Committee

The list goes on and on.

III

So as we come to the table this special night let us be very aware of our many service areas. That is Eucharist and it is what gives us the right to approach the Lord's Supper.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me suggest that this very night in Iraq brothers and sisters of ours are celebrating the Lord's Supper just like us. May we in a few moments, therefore, come to this table deeply repentant for our nation's sins against those sisters and brothers and then go and live that repentance as citizens of this nation.