

HOLY THURSDAY REFLECTION FROM FR. NAZ

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; Psalm 115: 12-13, 15-18 r. cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 16; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-15

Food for thought

In the quietness and stillness of our lockdown, today we enter the Sacred Triduum, the climax of our Lenten journey. The readings and the ceremonies are almost too rich to digest; tonight's service is a reminder of the institution of the precious gift of the Eucharist, which is a gift on more levels than we can easily grasp.

Tonight, I will be making a Personal Renewal of Priestly Commitment. Ordinarily in the archdiocese of Birmingham all the priests of the diocese gather at the mother church, St Chad's Cathedral to make a group renewal of their priestly Commitment before the archbishop Bernard Longley. Please pray for me I rededicate myself to serve Our Lord and the Church by making this act of personal renewal before the Blessed Sacrament this evening.

In your prayer today, you may find yourself led in several different directions. Here are a few possibilities.

1. First, the reading from Exodus takes us back to the greatest feast of the year for our Jewish forebears, and reminds us of that great act of deliverance from their oppressors. You might want to pray about what is currently oppressing you, our world, our country and our community today. You might want to ask the Lord what to do about it.

2. Secondly, the psalm is a song of praise for God's unshakable fidelity: "the Lord will bless the house of Israel...Praise the Lord". Here you might prayerfully reflect on what you and your community are giving thanks for, this evening.; and make your own the line from Paul that is our response: "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in Christ's blood?"

3. Then, thirdly, there is the reading from 1 Corinthians; Paul is very cross because of their divisions, and to correct them he reminds them of what Jesus did on this very night, before he died, taking bread, giving thanks, and saying (with unmistakable reference to his death) "this is my body for you", and likewise with the cup "this cup is the new covenant in my blood". We hardly understand what he is saying, but dimly we grasp that this is for us, and that it is costly. "As often as you eat this loaf and drink the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death - until he comes". Does that give you a way into prayer on this rich night?

4. Finally, you might choose to gaze in astonishment at the acted parable with which John has chosen to begin his account of the Last Supper, not the institution of the Eucharist, but Jesus, to Peter's horror, performing for all the disciples, including Judas, an act that was thought too lowly even for slaves to do, the washing of their feet. And the evangelist explains what is going on: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end". The name of the game, you see, is love.

How are you going to respond today?

How might tonight's rich liturgy affect the way you are going to celebrate these three days in isolation of your home? So many people have shared with me the many online celebrations they are connected to within the diocese, the country and other parts of the world: the Vatican, United States, Australia, South Africa, you name it.... As you stay home please do spend some time reflecting how it would feel to have your feet washed, and consider opportunities to wash the feet of others even as you do not get to touch them. How will it change the rest of your life?