

Maundy Thursday Year C

“This is how everyone will recognize that you are a disciple of mine; that you love one another.”

My brother Bob spent the night with us last night. It was good to see him. We've not seen much of each other since I went off to seminary some nine years ago. Bob is in addiction recovery and doing well, for almost two years now....Bob, not really of his choosing, has had to play unhappily the prodigal in our family...we had the chance to catch up on a lot of things...old family stories, running jokes between us that I had forgotten...about how Tom Still rescued us teenagers from the motorcycle gang on the side of the road...about how funny our father was... of how happy Bob, just become uncle Bob, was at the birth of James our first child....about the various lives of our children... we talked a little about work....about our mother....about all the characters we had known growing up, who would end up at our table....And now he at ours... We told each other that we loved each other this morning and Bob left....our bonds of affection still there after all these years....It felt like family.

They will know you are a disciple of mine by how you love...salvation not something we believe, but something we do....a doing love. In the midst of the gathering gloom of Jesus, the innocent's impending arrest and trial and crucifixion, in today's gospel reading, Jesus gives us the prime example of what this love looks like...a prime example of what at last will stand against such evil...the intractable brutality and shame of our world...and it is not some cosmic whirlwind, or some decisive, epic battle on the grand scale of Hollywood....and not even his tragic death...no, no magic about this love, but love that comes in simple acts of sacrifice and welcome and the fragile dignity that comes to light through such sacrifice and welcome that we afford to each other...sacred dignity that affirms the distant memory, half forgotten perhaps, that we are made in God's image....that we are children and heirs of God.

The symbol for this love quite simply is the washing of feet...an utter bending to the other...an act in which there is no servant or master...only mutual welcome...the means of remembering the bonds of affection that stand forever in the household of God, always have...always will...the washing of feet and a gracious meal the means of initiation into the household of God...sacrifice the means of God's commonweal breaking in to our world, at each and every act of welcoming sacrifice.

In the Koine Greek and in the Hebrew there is no word that matches our word “family”, our narrow definition that speaks of blood kin only...the word in our text here is household....the word household which implies not just kin, but workers, guests, friends at table...those who would sojourn among us...even the stranger...a family extended without end...indeed in the household of God we are of one blood...one people, one household...one commonweal, in which our principal duty is to bend to the needs of our brother...one household in which to bend to the needs of our sister...to love as Christ loves no less...that is the commandment Jesus leaves us with...to love as he loves...which is a life predisposed to common interest and not self interest....lives lived in mutuality and not hierarchy, a household of peace and justice, not violence and inequity...a household of grace, not fear...

It is in living into the household of God, to which there is always a standing invitation...in which all are welcome no matter how prodigal, no matter what...It is in living into the household of God that will shore up the souls and bodies of the human community against the dark forces of our world that would do us in...indeed in every act of sacrifice and welcome, the darkness is transformed into light...one welcome at a time...one gracious cleansing touch at a time....touch that cleanses us from isolation...intimate touch, love in the flesh, that makes us family.

As the Christ told his brother Peter, unless I wash you, you have no share in me...It is just so for us, brothers and sisters...unless we wash the feet of our neighbor, brother and sister householders, then the world has no share in the saving power of this sacred way of God...a way in which the bonds of God’s affection are already there for us and for all...amid our old stories....among our collective memory of where we come from and to whom we belong...of meals graciously shared...and guests welcomed...love remembered...this the household in which there are many rooms of welcome...this household that feels like family, the way family is meant to be in Gods all-welcoming embrace....family in which we live for each other as equals...a welcoming embrace in which all stand with dignity...welcome in which we all are awash with God’s favor...welcome that will in no small way raise the dead to life....and they’ll always know who we are and whose we are by such love.