

Maundy Thursday, Year C

April 1, 2010

Exodus 12: 1-14, Psalm 34, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26, John 13: 1-17, 31-35

Exodus 12: 1-14

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Psalm 34

¹I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
²My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.
³O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.
⁴I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.
⁵Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.
⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.
⁷The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.
⁸O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.
⁹O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.
¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
¹¹Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
¹²Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?
¹³Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.
¹⁴Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.
¹⁵The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.
¹⁶The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
¹⁷When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.
¹⁸The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.
¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.
²⁰He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken.
²¹Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
²²The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13: 1-17, 31-35

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

In the first reading, we heard about the "institution" of the Passover. As it turns out, just two nights ago, Jewish families throughout the world gathered for the Seder meal. At one point, the youngest in the house asks the question: "Why is this night different than all others?" At that point, the leader of the Seder recounts the story of the Exodus.

I think it's fair to say that on this holy night, when we celebrate and remember the Lord's supper, at least as recorded by St. John, the question is, "Why *should* tonight be any different from all others?"

Unlike the other three Gospels, St. John's does not include an "institution narrative" (This is my body, This is my blood), which pointed to a renewed significance for what the disciples did that Passover evening. Instead, St. John has Jesus washing the feet of His disciples, performing a task considered even too lowly for slaves. It was *that* action by and through which Jesus was to be remembered on that holy night. It was that act of humility and service that was to be forever associated with the liberation of the people by God and the forming of God's new people.

Tonight we are called, in the words of the earliest of Church fathers, to “live what we celebrate” and to “become what we receive”.

Tonight we are called to a “costly” discipleship and to be wary of what one of the commentaries I consulted called “the danger of a spirituality divorced from everyday life”.

In the second reading, St. Paul was writing to that community for exactly that reason. Some of the Corinthians believers in Jesus were very “spiritual”. They had “arrived”. It was superior knowledge of the “mysteries” of the faith, or the showy gift of tongues, or the gift of prophecy, that were important. In fact, they were so “spiritual” that what happened to their bodies, or the bodies of others for that matter, was unimportant or secondary. It was what you believed and your religious experiences that counted.

Not so, said St. Paul. The Eucharistic meal is a call to community, mutual love, and respect. The wealthier and “spiritual” members of the community were gathering early for the Lord’s Supper, for they had more “leisure” to do so, and were eating all of the food and drinking all the wine before the other, “lesser” members arrived. St. Paul reminded them about what that celebration made and called them to be- the very body of Christ in the world and for each other. So, in its full context, this particular reading, the oldest written “witness” to the Eucharist, is more about correct behavior than correct belief.

On this night, may we be given the grace to become Christ’s presence for one another and for the world.

AMEN.