

Holy Thursday 2021
Exodus 12.1-8, 11-14
I Corinthians 11.23-26
John 13.1-15

One year ago – Holy Thursday was our very first remote liturgy. Little did we expect we'd be back in the Zoom church one year later. Much has happened in the meantime. We regularly observe how different life is, how strange the world seems, how weighty the challenges, social, political, global, personal. What stories will we be telling about this time? Have lives been impacted for the worse or for the better, or both? What memories shall we keep?

Holy Thursday is about memory-making and memory-keeping. The story of the First Passover has been told and re-told for millennia. God reaches extends the strong arm of freedom to a people enslaved and oppressed. In the earliest Scriptural text about the Last Supper, St. Paul recites the words Jesus prayed over the bread and cup and adds "Do this in remembrance of me." What is striking is the different emphasis we find in the gospel of John: no mention of these words Jesus speaks, but complete attention on what Jesus does: Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. For the evangelist, THIS is the Last Supper story, this is THE memory. Notice how precise are the details: Jesus leaves his place at table, removes his garb, wraps a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, begins to wash the disciples' feet, and dries them with the towel. Jesus, tenderly, lovingly, humbly, washing our feet. Feet. Feet that have walked the dusty roads. Tired feet. Aching feet. And yes, dirty feet.

This was the common work of a servant or slave. This was not the duty of a teacher or mentor. Nor was it necessarily expected of a disciple.

For the past year we have been fasting from the eucharist. An involuntary fast. Not a fast we would have chosen but one we have embraced, for the sake of the common good and the safety of one another: an involuntary fast rooted in the solid gospel mandate of caring for and caring about the neighbor. Catholic teaching on the eucharist holds that the Real Presence is not restricted to the bread and cup, but extends to the very gathering of community, as we greet and embrace one another, gather around the altar table, and lift our voices in song and prayer and dance to the psalm. This, too, is Christ truly present, and we have fasted from this eucharist for the common good and well-being of one another.

But there is no fast from washing feet. For here also is the Real presence of Christ. Jesus, in choosing to wash his companions' feet, gives us a glimpse into who God desires to be for us – a God who stoops to wash our feet. Jesus also mirrors discipleship for us: humble, generous, servant discipleship. We are all connected.

We live in a social and political climate that prizes a toxic and destructive hyper-individualism. The antidote for this is community. A community steeped in the memory of Jesus. It is in such a community that we learn the practice of washing feet. It is where the gospel is enfleshed in each one's lived experience.

So on this night as we retell the story of Jesus washing the feet of his companions we may recall stories of our own: stories of unexpected blessing, of friends showing up on the doorstep of our grief or our fear, the sometimes silent and often spoken message "You are not alone." Stories of our own reaching out in healing love and humble service. And we have shared stories of feeding the hungry, biking and walking in solidarity to end HIV/AIDS, standing up and standing with those who are humiliated and excluded and suffer violence simply because of who they are.

One thing that has been a blessing this past year, is Sunday after Sunday, we've explored and pondered the Sunday Scriptures, keeping alive the gospel stories, and sharing our questions, our struggles, and our insights, thereby unleashing the liberating power of these stories. Such stories create and sustain community and nurture prophetic vision.

There are memories we will take forward with us. These are the stories we will tell and retell.