

Holy Thursday, 2009

1. As you well know, this evening we celebrate the institution, that is, the beginning, of the Eucharist. So we recall the night on which Jesus had supper with his disciples and for the first time gave them bread and wine as his body and blood. Moreover, we recall the fact that in doing this Jesus was giving a new meaning to the traditional Passover meal of his people, the Jews. The Jewish Passover meal recalls how God instructed the Jews enslaved in Egypt to slaughter a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts of their homes so that the angel of death would pass over them and not kill their children, as he would do to the houses of the Egyptians. Now, at his last meal, Jesus offered his own blood to save people. He is the new lamb.

2. Obviously, in commemorating this institution of the Eucharist, the church uses the scriptural texts which describe this event. These texts are to be found in the Gospels of Mt, Mk and Luke and in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, our second reading for this evening. But did you notice that while we read from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we don't read from one of the three Gospels which contain the texts describing this institution. Instead we read from the one Gospel which does not have these words, that of John.

John does have an account of the Last Supper, but it is very different from the accounts given in the first three gospels, especially so because his account does not mention the institution of the Eucharist. Instead John has this scene—unique to him—of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at this final meal. What does this substitution mean? It means that John wants us to see this washing of the feet as the meaning of the Eucharist. For John Jesus' washing the feet of his disciple is equivalent to Jesus' giving the disciples bread and wine as his body and blood broken and poured out for them.

3. As we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist by reenacting Jesus' washing of the feet, let us remind ourselves of what must be central to our lives: If we are to follow Jesus, we must live to serve others, as he did. Life changes. Therefore we have to update our lives of service. How, we must ask ourselves, should we now serve Jesus by serving others?