

Holy Thursday
April 18, 2019
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Reflection

Imagine what feet look like. They used to look different. If we picture them bare, we see them as clean. Either that, or we see them covered in layers of protection. Cream and powder preserve the skin; cotton and wool keep them warm, tough soles and leather provide armor. But feet used to look different. We protect them from dirt and rocks, stubs and thorns. The apostles travelled light, wearing sandals over dusty bumpy roads. Their feet, most peoples' feet, were dirty and tough, cracked and banged up. If they pictured feet, would they see them as clean, or would they see them covered in layers of dirt? Would they picture the feet themselves or the grime that covers them?

In today's Gospel, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. It was an act of love and an act of service. "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." He rinsed away the dust and revealed them as they are; as they truly are: bare, clean, stripped of protection; from appearance to reality. It reminds us of the salvation that we get from baptism, our strengthening from confirmation and anointing, healing from confession, and grace from communion. His priests provide these sacraments to make us more and more what God intends us to be: free from sin and imitators of his Son; ourselves but fully realized; saved and strong, healed by love.

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14
Ps 116
1 Cor 11:23-26
Jn 13:1-15

The sacraments make us cleaner than clean, through signs that are more real than real.

The first reading points to this mystery. "They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it." We can picture this blood running, dripping and drying; a vision of horror, an image of death. But this blood was life. "The 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." Those who were saved saw past the gore on the door. They received protection, experienced deliverance and felt the love of God.

Jesus fulfills the Passover by offering himself as the lamb without blemish, the first-born of God struck down for our sins. We lift up the cup of salvation at each Eucharist, making present the covenant in his Blood. It is no longer wine, but his body and blood, soul and divinity. His presence is real and we are washed in his blood. Our lips moistened with the Blood of Christ are like those doorposts on the night of the Passover, safeguarding divine life within.

The prayer that Jesus gives us reveals the depth of the mystery. We say, "give us this day our daily bread." The word "daily" is an English translation of the Greek word "epi-ousion" (ἐπιούσιον). It does mean "daily", but literally translated, this word is "more than substantial" or "super essential".

We see this in the Latin bible, which has "supersubstantialem": understand this as "more real than real". Our daily bread is necessary for earthly life. God gives it to us along with every good thing. But the Body of Christ is more than we can perceive with our limited senses, which are like a veil that darkens sight. Only faith infused into a soul can apprehend the saving mystery that brings eternal life. Just as the present moment is more real than our memory of the past; has more existence than our dreams of the future, the Bread of Life exceeds its own appearance and taste. It's the loving embrace of God carrying us to glory, and for this we give thanks.

"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." For this Eucharist, let us receive the love of God, be remade as ourselves, and bring his love out to the world.