

Holy Thursday

April 17, 2025

People believe all sorts of different things in many areas of life, but particularly when it comes to faith and religion, that is, when we try to answer the really big questions. And we Catholics, in particular, believe things that many people struggle to understand or accept or embrace. Many of those things are on full display on this holy night.

We celebrate the Blessed Sacrament tonight, our God coming to us as real food for the journey.

Priests and all the faithful celebrate and give thanks to God this night for the gift of priesthood, a specific role and responsibility and privilege in the life of the Church. We also celebrate the gift of holy oils that will be used throughout the year, tangible, created things that somehow become signs of and the means to an outpouring of God's grace in various holy moments and under certain circumstances.

And as we always do at Liturgy, we celebrate our holy texts, the Sacred Scripture, words meant to inspire and educate and comfort and challenge and transform us.

My dear friends, all these things point to an array of unique beliefs, understandings that are not always in line with what other people believe or don't believe. They point to our beliefs in special God-moments in what we call Sacraments, and in the power of what happens at this table, and in the presence of God in a collection of inspired words of human authors. Yes, people do believe all sorts of different things and the often challenging, hard-to-grasp things Catholics believe are very visible on this holy night.

Then why do the lives of believers and non-believers often look alike?

“Do you realize what I have done for you?”

Jesus' earthly life was nearing its end. He had done so much in just a few years, in fact three years to be precise. He had astonished people with his ability to heal and his power over nature. He drove out demons and multiplied loaves and fishes and walked on water and saved a woman caught in adultery from harm and gave a blind man his sight and even raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. Incredible. Yes, he did all sorts of remarkable and unexplainable things.

But for the most part he talked. He told stories (often containing surprising endings). He spoke with authority about spiritual matters and even the Law itself. He challenged those who needed to be challenged, encouraged those who needed encouragement, and comforted those who needed comfort. And he even said things that were pretty hard for his disciples to understand, stuff about his impending death, and about something he referred to as the Bread of Life, and a cryptic series of statements about blessedness and all sorts of other stuff that often left them scratching their heads.

And as he neared the end, this is what he chose to do, something common, ordinary and earthly. He chose to wash his disciples feet, something big men and today's leaders will never do, and made sure they knew that they were to do the same.

Why?

Well, we don't know with complete certainty. But it seems to me that he might have been fearing something, and I don't mean just his path to Calvary. I think he might have been worried that his disciples would confuse discipleship with simply "believing" certain things that others didn't believe. In that situation it would be the things in their mind, the things they thought, the things they said that would be the measure of their faithfulness. And Jesus could not have disagreed more.

The faith he desired for them was the kind of faith that manifested itself not simply in words or ideas or convincing arguments, but in action. How

someone lived was the only true evidence of the authenticity of what they believed. Jesus, of course, knew that, and wanted to make sure they knew it too.

In other words, followers of Jesus, that's you and me are not just people who believe some different things than others believe. Rather, we are also people we DO things other people DON'T DO. That's what we've signed on for. In fact, it's what drew people to be Christians in the first place. They lived in such a way that others looked at them and wanted to be a part of whatever they were about.

And so as followers of Jesus we are called to love in situations in which others don't want to love. We are called to forgive the things no one wants to forgive. We are called to be generous with others in a way that actually costs us something. We are called to dry the tears of people who have no one to dry them. We are called to see others as God sees them, not how the world sees them. We are called to be kind when we don't feel like it, understanding when we don't feel like it, merciful when we don't feel like it, and hopeful when we don't feel like it.

Put another way, we are called to wash one another's feet.

Will we accept this wish, this hope, this desire, this command of our God? Or will our lives look exactly the same as everyone else's? Will our faith just be things we "think" or will it be the way we actually live? My dear friends, Jesus wants so much more from us and for us.

And so as we come forward to receive him in this sacred meal, may our "Amen" be a pledge to be the loving people we were created to be. Jesus certainly deserves that. And the world certainly needs that.