

OT: Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14

NT: 1 Corinthians 11.23-26

Gp: John 13.1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday is the day when we enact Jesus' *mandatum*, hence the name, to love one another and to wash feet as he did. Jesus meets his disciples today and shows himself totally and literally at their service. He kneels to do a menial task for them – a reminder how in Jesus' gospel, power, authority, and significance is always going to be about service. To be authoritative is to lay your authority aside. Something of this tradition was seen today in the curious survival of the Royal Maundy, at Worcester Cathedral when the Queen, representing the King, gave the Maundy money. As the BBC commentary reminded us, this looks back to the days when the monarch really was expected to be a bit like a priest for the nation – acting out this great symbol of faith on behalf of everyone. Mediaeval monarchs did indeed wash feet, showing us that the King was doing what priests and bishops often did, not only on Maundy Thursday. It's a mistake to think that this is something of the past only. The Coronation last year was very much an anointing for service. It's largely about the feeling that Someone, (Christ himself), is reminding us of things that we know matter for the wellbeing of the nation. Power needs to be reminded constantly of what it is for. It's a reminder too that this is the standard by which the gospel of Jesus judges the powerful of this world.

You might just ask then, should we enact laws that make government ministers and political leaders spend some time every year serving dinners in a primary school or a council estate? Cleaning some homes, watching human mess on the streets? Or asking what does the concrete power of an Israeli government, in relation to the poorest and most disadvantaged of its Palestinian neighbours say about the aim of the covenant of the people with God? Whatever answer you want to give to that question, it is important to remember that this is not an empty question. We do need to remember what politics and governments are for... not for the brokering of power. The gospel tells us that the goal of the supreme power of the universe is that we should be nurtured, fed, and loved. It's a challenge not just to politicians, but to priests and bishops and archbishops too.

The Mass that we celebrate tonight itself embodies the truth that life is triumphant and active in the very heart of evil, betrayal, rejection, and violence; it is the breaking of bread on the same night in which Jesus was given up to death. As we embark on the next three days, we are left with the questions Jesus puts to us again in his words: his death and resurrection, but also in the life and death of his saints and martyrs: 'whose is the voice you speak with?' Whose are the needs you speak for? What is the truth you embody?

Being nurtured and fed is indeed what we observe from our environment too. My colleague Steven Shakespeare, in his reflections on the environment, often spoke about how the things around us absorb the raw material of life from one another. You look at a tree, and you see an extraordinary process going on, not some dead thing, but an exchange of life. It draws light and sucks up water from soil and produces greenery or fruit to nourish us and the process goes on again. Food results from the flow of life. When we are fed, we are absorbed into that process of nourishment, even when we don't notice it. The entirety of our environment is making us and keeping us alive, which is why the tradition of saying grace at meals remains important. And the Gospel of John emphasised from the beginning that the light from the beginning of days, embodied in Christ is the life of the world, is the nourishment of the world, is the food that comes down to feed and nourish us.

Our own life allows us to make the bread and the wine for tonight's celebration. In our second reading of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminded us that the Mass is an enactment of the words and action of Jesus and as such it is when the entire mystery of our universe comes to its supreme point materially and spiritually. Here we have the foremost sign in our midst of the kingly power of Christ. This is what embodies the 'power of God', it is the power to make alive, to feed and to nourish. Jesus makes himself our food. It's natural then that as Jesus confronts his death, as he prepares to go forward to his agony, he gathers at the table and he feeds his disciples and as he feeds them with wine and bread that he consecrates, he reminds them that his death like his life will be their food. We, as his friends, are to absorb this reality to come alive in this radical and far reaching and inclusive way. His cross becomes that perfect tree that bears that fruit for us.

The Church, including us gathered here, needs to face the events of Holy Week afresh. Father Crispin made a sad announcement on Sunday and explained his reasons for his decision. The implication of that announcement is clear: the Church had a history of putting the cross to its own uses to silence and suppress others: Jews, Muslims, gays, and women. But we are reminded tonight that for us to be the Body of Christ is for us to exercise that royal power of nourishment through Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit. We are here so that we may nourish. When Jesus meets Peter after the Resurrection in John's gospel, he does not tell him to administer the Church well, nor to rule and govern, not even to teach, but to feed his flock.

We need to test all our claims to and exercise of power by this simple criterion. Do we, in what we do, nourish? Like Peter, our power rests on our ability, like him to repent, turn around. If we, in the Church of England, and more widely, acknowledge our failures and weaknesses, we would be better equipped to nourish and feed the society more effectively. This is the radical service. We can nourish when we are hungry ourselves, not when we think that we have our fill. As we gather here tonight and watch over the sacrament, we are living in and from the feeding of Jesus Christ. Here we have the nourishing liberty of our King. We are here because we are hungry for new beginnings, hungry for mercy and hungry

to repair the damage that the world around us suffers, from Ukraine to Palestine and elsewhere. May we nourish as we have been nourished, feed as we are fed, give as we have been given, and love as we are loved.

Fr Yazid Said