

Maundy Thursday

Washed and fed

In the Church's year there is a vast chunk of time called "ordinary time". I have never liked that. It sounds as if there is some time that we find meaningless.

All liturgies are a marking of time. Each day we awake, and we need to begin with a sense of new birth. Each night we lie down, and we need to surrender our hold on life, to die a little. Every day needs to be consecrated, to be marked with the sign of the Cross, so that it may be a safe place to be born, and a safe place to die.

The day we are *actually* born, and the day we *actually* die, are of great significance to us; these realities are the true giving of meaning to time. But *every* day is that day for someone not too far from us. We live properly when we are most aware of our community with the human family, always opening its eyes for the first time, and constantly accomplishing its journey at the end. Truly, there should be no time in between that is "ordinary time", no time of little meaning.

We know this very clearly as we enter into this night, the night on which Jesus shared his table for the last time. Something tremendous is gathering its power, ready to burst into the calm reality of table, dishes, cups, bread and wine. What is familiar and ordinary is about to be overturned and emptied, smashed and forgotten, as sudden agony overtakes the heart of Jesus, as his friends are scattered and dishonoured, and the polite and homely give way to the official, the military, the powerful. This time tomorrow someone is going to be dead. But there are two minds, amongst those at table, already attuned to what is about to happen: Jesus has already seen the destiny that must be faced; and Judas is also further along the path than his fellow-disciples.

The mind of Jesus holds us tonight, as we watch with reverence the moves he makes, so lovingly recorded by the Beloved Disciple. He looks on his friends with a love undamaged by what he knows, and he does for them the two deeds which have given us our way of consecrating time ever since: he *washes* them, and he *feeds* them. In his washing of them, he shows that his death is at their service. In his feeding them, he calls them to share with him even through this night. In his washing, he takes from them the failures of the past. In his feeding, he offers them life for the future. In this moment, their past and their future are reconciled in the present. His oncoming death is already enacted, in the *lastness* of the Supper – known by Jesus and Judas, but not by the rest. The laying-down of his life is already done, in the slave's work he accepts, *which Peter does not yet understand*. Tonight we do these things in memory of him.

But I have come to think Judas might have understood better than the others. Judas' knowledge only comes from his treachery; and it has to do with his eventual death. Did Judas think that he was in control of the events of this night? If he did, it came to a grisly end for him. The Gospel is well aware that, from the opposite poles of love and betrayal, Jesus and Judas *share* their knowledge at the supper. We are even told: "Jesus said: *What you are going to do, do quickly*. None of the others at table understood why he said this." So physically close, Jesus and Judas speak to each other across the great gulf, that is between salvation and eternal loss.

So Judas has knowledge, and it binds him and his Master to their separate deaths. We too have knowledge: and we must be sure that, proceeding from our fidelity, it will bring us to life. In this night we too are entering the upper room, to take our places at the Supper of the Lord; so did Peter, but so also did Judas. We must let

Jesus thoroughly wash us, if we are to eat and drink with him worthily. We must not take our piece of his broken bread, and then go out into the darkness; we must let Jesus live in us, if we are to remain in him as he goes to the Father.

Lord, we are not worthy to receive you. Only say the word, and we shall be healed.