

We are here to celebrate in a very precise way the Last Supper of the Lord. What does that mean for us, and how can we do it well?

The heart of the Last Supper is an unspeakable truth. It hangs in the air, and small facets of it are grasped and recognised by different people at different moments. But it is finally unspeakable, because it isn't a truth made up or agreed between human beings, but the truth that is at the heart of God. God into human language won't go.

The truth about the disciples at the Last Supper would have been easy to tell if they hadn't met Jesus of Nazareth. But now that he is in their midst, and they have been assembled as his people, the disciples too are infected with the indefinable reality of the Incarnation: God made Man.

I find that the duty to speak at Easter concentrates my mind, and every year I seem to get a new thought that I can't stop worrying at, like a greyhound who's caught up with the hare and is taking it apart. My great realisation as we went through Lent this year has been about the meaning of what theologians call the two natures of Christ - the fact that he is both God and Man.

Jesus is frighteningly intimate with his disciples. They are totally devoted to him, and they know he is no ordinary rabbi. They also know what it is to say the right thing to him, and what it is to say the wrong thing. As time goes on, Mark says, they increasingly fall silent before him, especially when he speaks frighteningly about his death, which he urges on them several times. *They do not understand him, and are afraid to ask.* Men into God won't go.

The Last Supper is contained in this same unspeakability. It seems certain that his predictions are about to be verified, and the oncoming Passover only increases the tension: tonight we are on the very threshold of inexpressible mystery. The language of laying-down of life mingles with the little ceremonies of the table, to make the Mass: *this bread is my body, broken for you; this is the cup of my blood, poured out in a new covenant for the eternal forgiveness of sin.* The truth that Jesus knows is the Cross; the one disciple who may know it is Judas. In some way, Jesus and Judas are therefore accomplices, just as Judas has made himself a conspirator with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. But Peter has no way of understanding what is in Jesus' mind; his reaction to the tension in the air is to have one hand on his sword. Tonight in the garden all this tension will reach a climax, and then be resolved. But Peter will not be at the heart of things, because he doesn't understand.

Jesus tonight spends his last free time with his own. How will he use this last time? He gives them a sign. The washing of their feet is a sign they do not yet know how to read; until they see the crucifixion they will not have the key to it. Even then they will fail to see that his willingness freely to do what even a slave could refuse to do, and his willingness under duress to die like a slave are the same thing. I can't help saying, as I look at the Cross: *God into Man won't go.* It's as if Jesus has died, not from the powers of priest or prefect, nor of the false disciple, but of being who he is: God and Man. This disaster of a human being, condemned for blasphemy - *he claims to be Son of God* - dies of his own truth. In his deserted body we can look at the wreckage we made, when God came to dwell with us. That will be tomorrow's revelation. Tonight we live with the mystery that no-one can yet speak about. But Jesus knows that the hands that break the bread tonight will never do so again, and he "*shall not drink wine any more, until the Kingdom comes*". Before this mystery he will lay aside all dignity and earthly rank, and become lower than a slave. We should not blame our inability to come with him; his own human nature cries out to the Father for mercy in the garden, and his obedience will be agonised: but it will be obedience to his nature as Son of God; and that is what will save his brothers and sisters. *The Word was made flesh, and lived among us.*