

HOLY THURSDAY

In 2010 when I was pastor at Holy Redeemer I also taught religion to the 8th graders in our school. In their text an example came up concerning the thoughts and feelings we had on 9/11/01. When I asked these 13 and 14 yr old students their memory of 9/11 they had very little. They were 5 when it happened. They knew about it. Some were from New York so it was more personal to their families, but their recollections of that day were spotty at best. They were just too young. However, they were old enough to remember the hurricanes the summer of '04. They remembered the fear, the loss of power, and all that happened that crazy summer and fall.

Every generation has its memories that they can share with each other. Tragedies and natural disasters that filled you with fear and questions are those things that bind you together. While I wasn't alive when WWII started and only a small child when JFK was killed I know what 9/11 means. Those experiences in 1941 or 1963 that united you did so for me and my generation in 2001. The truth of the matter is that every human being will have times of fear, doubt, and worry. We have times that we question why things happen and what they mean. We question too whether God understands and cares about us.

These next few days are God's answer to those questions. Jesus knew the powers of darkness were closing in on him. He knew that His own disciples were questioning why he wasn't amassing an army or planning to overthrow the political and religious leaders. He knew that Peter would deny him, Judas would betray him, and the others would run away and hide. He knew that the Father was with him in His prayer, when he healed the blind man, and when he gave 5000 enough bread to eat on the mountain. Yes, He knew it and His disciples knew it. But would the next generation know it? Would they remember?

Israel had long forgotten their sojourn in the desert, yet they remembered that God was still with them every time they celebrated Passover. They would not have recalled the mud on the sandals of those who came out of the Red Sea, but they knew that God did not forget them when they were oppressed by the Greeks and Romans. They knew that God would rescue them now and in the future. It was this very same promise that Jesus gave His followers and gave us.

Jesus teaches His disciples two last things on this night. He took unleavened bread and wine, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them and said, "This is my Body, this is my Blood. I am with you whenever you are here and retell the story, and break the bread, and share this cup. For this cup is poured out that your sins might be forgiven and you would be healed." Jesus gave us His Body and Blood in the form of a meal so that no matter where we are or what we are facing we are not alone. He is with us, intimately and completely. Our sadness, loneliness and fears are calmed by the power of the Eucharist. The joys and celebrations we share have Jesus in our midst as well.

The Eucharist isn't a retelling of an event from history. Instead, it is a reminder of God's abiding presence today. By giving us this gift to be shared every Sunday and every day we know that life has meaning. Our God cares for us completely. But then Jesus teaches us a second lesson when He washed their feet. If we want to understand how our God loves and forgives us we must do the same for others. We must be willing to be a servant just as Jesus became a servant on this earth for us. "He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, being born in

the likeness of men..." We need to remember we are to be servants to one another, particularly to the lost and forgotten.

Peter stands like all of us not understanding how one can be a master and a servant at the same time. It is uncomfortable to serve others, but sometimes it is even more uncomfortable to be served. We have been so conditioned into thinking that if someone does something for us they want something in return. I suspect we believe this because our love and forgiveness for others is too often conditional. The lesson for tonight is that Jesus' love for us is unconditional. Jesus' death and resurrection was done for us and we can never repay that, at least not directly.

We can, however, show others the same mercy that has been shown us. We can reach out to those who feel unloved. We can console those who are fearful and doubting. We can be present in the lives of those around us. Yes, tonight the lessons we reflect on remind us that we are never alone and that we should never forget those in need. Our God has loved us first so that we might love one another as well.