

Holy Thursday

April 6, 2023

St. Patrick

“More Than a Meal.” Tonight, too.

For twenty years here at St. Patrick’s, on the last Sunday of each month—oh, it’s a tradition here, we have “More Than a Meal.” It’s a specially prepared dinner, cooked in our outreach center by parishioners. Our guests, folks from our neighborhood and beyond, are welcomed, and each sits at a table. Parishioners and other volunteers bring to each guest’s place a dinner plate heaping with a hot home-cooked meal, together with a drink of their choice, and dessert.

In the adjoining rooms, foot care volunteers, including a wound-care specialist, welcome those who wish their feet to be washed and massaged. Nurses also take vital signs about guests’ general health—for some, something not done for them for years.

Each month, it really is “More Than a Meal.”

So is tonight. We begin the great Three Days, and during all three days we remember and celebrate Jesus’ suffering, his death, and his resurrection. Tonight we begin with the first Lord’s Supper. Right before the consecration of the bread and wine, only on this night, the church has the priest say these words: **“On the day before he was to suffer, for our salvation and the salvation of all, that is today, he took bread...”**

“...that is, today.” So we, at *this* sacred Eucharist, and each time we celebrate Mass—yes, we hear Jesus’ words, **“Do this in memory of me.”** Jesus wants us to place ourselves *right there* at his table that first Last Supper and, as he did the first time, he feeds us with his very Flesh and Blood, sacrificed on the cross. That’s what *remembering* truly means, just as the Jewish faithful do this week as they celebrate *their* Passover meal—they, right there with their forebears.

“On the day before he was to suffer...that is, today.” *This* holy night, St. Patrick’s.

But, it’s “More Than a Meal.” In St. John’s Gospel, the last gospel written sometime in the final decade of the first century, the church may well had gotten

too caught up in ritual. It really needs to be “More Than a Meal.” So, as we heard tonight, Jesus got up, knelt down, and did “foot care” for each of his disciples, washing their feet.

Friends: Eucharist is always a meal *and* service.

A few days before my first Holy Thursday with you, I asked Mary Rubin if I could wash her feet. Immediately she said, “Yes.” I knelt down and washed her feet. However, I was concerned about time—ugh!—and didn’t linger in the foot washing. Then, Mary Rubin—who died of pancreatic cancer two months later—knelt down and, just as a foot care specialist, Mary gently poured and rubbed in the water, tenderly massaging my feet and then drying them slowly.

Mary Rubin taught me how to do it! It’s always “More Than a Meal.” Hopefully many of us tonight will do as Jesus, and Mary Rubin, did, taking up the bowl of water and washing feet lovingly. If not feet, because it may be tough to kneel down, then—with the hands, washing the hands tenderly and lovingly. Tonight, we *all* need Jesus to give us a remedial lesson!

St. Patrick’s: We solemnly start off the Triduum, the Great Three Days. This Holy Thursday, we hear, **“On the day before he was to suffer for our salvation and the salvation of all, that is today, he took bread...”**

Yes, *today*! This sacred night and every Sunday—well, always “It’s More Than a Meal.”