

HOLY THURSDAY ESSENDON 2021
SERVICE AND SELF-SACRIFICE
Jn 13.1-15 1Cor 11.23-26 Ex 12.1-14

Welcome to Holy Thursday at St Therese's, after the first 2 year gap we have ever known, and, yes, well, at least we can be here to celebrate as a faith community of friends, as Jesus says: "*I call you my friends, if you do what I command you; love one another as I have loved you.*" And that is his fundamental call to service for all of us, each in our own way. As for the Last Supper, washing of feet back there was demeaning, a servant's work. The slaves can do it, having no rights, nothing owed, just a job to do. This is the model Jesus takes on for us to follow, as a metaphor for service of others.

John the Evangelist's farewell discourse is a long reflection on Jesus' final call to faith in him as *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, as Doubting or rather Honest Thomas, asks the obvious questions the others are thinking, in anxiety, fear and uncertainty, as Jesus heads towards the now inevitable conclusion of his earthly life, with the *Judas Kiss* of betrayal well on the way. Thus, the dark side of human nature is revealed in treacherous Judas, as we wonder *how could he?* And so, he briefly looks forward to the benefits of his newly to be acquired 30 pieces of silver, all to what end, as he too, heads into the darkness of despair and death, with no rewards or happiness to be found here!

In Leonardo's iconic Last Supper painting, from the 15th century (*here's my carpet copy tapestry version attached to the front of the altar tonight*), long after the historical event, Judas appears not so impressed! We might ask why? Wouldn't we think a charismatic personality like Jesus would win over most if not all, especially if one had been a companion on the journey of Jesus's public ministry! We don't know and never will. Legend or myth has it he was the treasurer of the group, managing the money, wherever it came from, but nothing is certain. If he was, couldn't he have helped himself, without selling his soul and losing his life as a result?

And now, with all the issues concerning women, their role in our society, and their mistreatment in demeaning ways, usually behind the scenes, in recent times, I think it a good opportunity to focus on Jesus' approach to women, throughout his public ministry, with dignity, respect and compassion. It's not just a matter of Mary his mother, who gets our attention and devotion, but also the way in which Jesus reached out to women and children and outcasts along the way, in a very counter-cultural manner to the social norms of the time. He provides service in reaching out to them as individuals who deserve his attention and encouragement, particularly in times of trial and tribulation.

We have the woman at the well, whom he approaches, inappropriately, according to the pharisaic laws of the time, where an adult male was not meant to associate with a female in public. Yet, he has no inhibitions initiating a conversation with her, and offering her living water, in terms of understanding her plight with as a serious serial monogamist with a poor track record for hanging onto husbands, non-judgmentally offering her '*living water*' (*symbolic of Baptism*), as a call to faith, and off she goes to tell the townspeople about him, effectively a missionary to her own local community!

Then, of course, there is the woman caught in adultery, about to be stoned, and I've spoken before about the great sculpture (*outside in Homebush Seminary in Sydney*), where the man is frozen in action, in two minds, between picking up the stone to throw, and looking to Jesus, who is seeing through and challenging their hypocrisy and judgemental and condemnatory attitudes, challenging them to look at themselves and their own bad behaviour behind the scenes. As we well know, they all end up slinking slowly out of the scene, until only Jesus is there with the poor woman, encouraging her to go and sin no more, offering forgiveness and another chance at life.

The widow of Naim provides another occasion for Jesus to offer comfort and healing too, in healing her son, not to forget his concern for Peter's mother-in-law in Capernaum, near the start of his ministry, having just called the apostles to join him on the mission of his itinerant journey through the villages and towns along the path of discipleship.

On Palm Sunday, we had the scenario in the Passion Gospel of Mark, where the unknown woman anoints Jesus with costly oil. They are guests at the house of good old Simon the leper, presumably a former outcast, and here he is, hosting a meal for all and sundry, it would seem. The indignant and angry reaction of some of those present is countered by Jesus approving of her action, reminding them and you and me, that the poor will always be with us.

This reminds us that we have a responsibility to serve them, by responding to their needs where we can, and contributing to their welfare, as we do with Project Compassion, supporting the good, quiet and effective work of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and our Parish Asylum Seekers Group, to name a few for starters.

Along with an unending artistic depictions of the Last Supper (show a few – different media too! Rock salt, postage stamps, toast chocolate sauce, butter, spider webs, acrylic vegetables, Rubik's Cubes, lint and the normal paint depictions from Leonardo da Vinci to Salvador Dali!), we always get the 12 gathered, in a Medieval or Renaissance setting of the 15th century, but were there any others present? Who served the meal and provided the bread and wine, and whatever else was part of the deal? Leonardo and others hardly give the full picture, rather later than the historical event, but provide a depiction of their impressions of the certainly memorable event, as we re-enact it not just this evening, but every time we gather in faith to celebrate and receive the Eucharist, where all are welcome.

What's clear at the end of it all, as the Apostles follow Jesus into the darkness, fearful and lost, is that Jesus has shown them the way to continue his mission, with his promise of his enduring presence, and that's our reassurance of faith too.

We've had a tough 12 months, without Easter presence in 2020, but let's be thankful we've come out of it now, more or less smiling and willing to continue to serve as faithful disciples, each in our own way.

The opportunities are there, starting in simple ways. Could we be more involved in contributing to parish community life, and more sensitive to those around us and beyond, and their needs, as we get back into gear again, as they say?!

Again, we are reminded the Project Compassion theme for this Lent of 2021 is “Be more”. So, as part of our Lenten commitment, let's continue to support the cause through your envelopes or boxes, or by credit card or on-line, and please return your boxes and envelopes to the church or parish office after Easter weekend.

john hannon

1st April 2021