

**HOLY THURSDAY YEAR C VIRTUAL REFLECTIONS 2022**  
**SERVICE, DIGNITY AND LOVE FOR SINNERS ALL!**

*Jn 13.1-15*

*Ex 12.1-8, 11-15*

*1Cor 11.23-26*

We gather to commemorate the Lord's Supper yet again (with me in spirit!), as Lent draws to a close, after the penitential reflections of Ash Wednesday, our communal Penitential Liturgy last week, the last evening I was free prior to a positive RAT test for COVID, before heading to Arcadia and later Trevi Court Aged Care, for pre-Easter Masses and Anointing, so just as well I tested myself! Unfortunately, I am now still tied down in isolation, with a persistent cough, which is hopefully slowly easing. I don't often do what my sisters tell me, but my rehab doctor sister Barbara warned me not to jump back into action too soon, so I've taken her advice, along with the health department's warning that a cough can still mean contagious!

This night takes me back to primary school in the 1950's, when we'd attend Holy Thursday Mass and the girls would spread rose petals during the final procession inside the church, to the altar of repose, with the parish priest walking under a canopy with the Monstrance, with the following hours for adoration and meditation prior to the solemnity and sadness of Good Friday. It conveyed something of wonder and mystery to me as a fascinated child. From vague memory, I think there was the traditional washing of the feet, of 12 men, to be sure, back there. I am not so sure I had the notion of this being about a call to service, which it clearly is, as I reflect on it now!

Over the last 2 years, our patience has been well tested with lockdowns, limitations of all sorts, uncertainty and a sense of anxiety too, as we've navigated our way to re-opening, and getting back together, but with precautions in place to protect ourselves and others. And now I find myself stranded with a cough after a quiet week alone at home with myself, my thoughts, jigsaw puzzles, Kindle and piano to keep me occupied and entertained. I was determined to be back in action for Holy Week Liturgies and Easter, but wiser minds prevailed! I am very grateful to the Columbans, particularly Father Tom Cleary, for helping us out at short notice, so the show goes on!

I just thought I'd put a few thoughts together for Holy Thursday, as we see this as one of the focal points for gathering as friends in a faith community. Our opportunities for service of the local community have been limited of necessity, for our own individual and common good. We've not known anything like this in our lifetime, unless you're over 103 (*Sister Josephine RSC, formerly Sister Luigi, is the only person I know that old!*), and even then, memory might well be limited!

John's Gospel has by far the longest farewell discourse by Jesus, as he reaches the end of his public ministry to face his inevitable fate, with suffering, crucifixion and death imminent. The injustice of it all makes us wonder why such wrongs are perpetrated on not just an innocent, but patently good, man, who has consistently preached and practised the Gospel of love.

Most significantly, while we celebrate the Last Supper as effectively the First Mass, we see John's emphasis on Jesus' initial actions as his disciples gather with him for the last time, after many meals together and much table fellowship with all and sundry, particularly the riff-raff ordinary people, looked down upon by the religious leaders, often loosely referred to as 'The Jews', but not meaning the Jews in general, but the 'Temple Police'.

Much has been achieved in Jesus' 3 years or so of public ministry, but all seems lost in fear and anxiety, as the ominous sense of doom descends as Jesus says farewell in a long, long discourse, as his final instructions as to how to continue the mission he has proclaimed. There's a long way to go yet, and Jesus is not returning on the next cloud, so we know not to just hold our breaths and try to keep out of trouble until he's back.

He offers hope in his assurance to Honest, rather than Doubting, Thomas as I prefer to call him, that he is *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, but what does that mean for you and me? His example is clear, that the humble act of service in washing his friends' feet, is a striking reminder of the responsibility of following his way accordingly, as people of service and friendship. Jesus calls them, and so us, '*his friends*', not just as a nice, comforting thought, but as a real commitment to love in all of its dimensions and to find fulfilment in following his way.

The details are not well defined at all, but the spirit to be taken in and reflected in word and action, is the spirit of the law of love and service, as the mission continues, sustained by Jesus, as the Bread of Life. John's Gospel covers the theology of Eucharist earlier, so he sees no need to repeat it here in the Last

Supper discourse. For us, Eucharist is ***Bread for the Broken***, to sustain us spiritually on our paths of life. It's no magic pill or talisman to protect us, but a means of providing inner strength, or what we used to call 'the grace of the sacrament'.

We hear every Holy Thursday, and often at First Communion celebrations, the earliest recorded account of a Christian community gathering for Eucharist in the homes of the Corinthians, who had taken to faith in Jesus with enthusiasm, but some misguided zeal, in thinking that Baptism was the way in, and yay Jesus, we're saved!! But, as we know, it's not all that simple, and the follow through requires active and ongoing response. Some of the class conscious Corinthians were not happy to welcome all, wishing to exclude those who didn't match up to their expectations of wealth and status. And so, missing the whole point of Paul, who proclaims an inclusive message for all comers who professed faith in Jesus.

And so now we move into the contemplative darkness as we prepare for the solemnity of Good Friday, knowing, however, that this is not the end of the story, or we wouldn't be here now, celebrating as a faith community!

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*14<sup>th</sup> April 2022*