

## Homily for Maundy Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021

*Mother Emma*

Readings: Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The story of Jesus' final night on earth as a human being makes us poignantly aware of all that it means to be truly human. As we are invited tonight to re-live the events of that evening, we open ourselves up to the broad range of human physicality, emotion and experience in the timelessness of ritual and remembrance.

Hearing the story of the Passover, just as Jesus and his friends would have begun the celebrations of their festival, we recall how in the dim and distant past the early Israelites ate their Passover meal standing up and dressed for their escape from slavery in Egypt; the protective blood of the lamb smeared on their door lintels.

In the shared meal, in the love and humility of the footwashing, and in the disintegration of familiarity and warmth into the confusion and darkness of Gethsemane, we are walking with Jesus' first century disciples.

But the present and the future are contained in this story too, as we promise in the Eucharist, "As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The rituals echo across the ages, and our human senses are touched and brought alive.

We hear the psalmist's desolation, quoted by Jesus on the Cross, in the poignant singing of Psalm 22 at the end of the service, and we are drawn together by music throughout the evening, as the disciples joined in their hymn before they left the security of the Upper Room for Gethsemane.

Sadly, this year, we are unable to wash one another's feet for Covid reasons, but as we create the image, I hope that we shall be able to imagine the coolness of the water and the softness of the towel touching our own feet, as it touched the feet of the disciples almost two thousand years ago. As we kneel, the choir will remind us of the importance of our love for one another, and assure us in their song, "Where love and charity are found, God is there." And finally, in the sharing of the bread and wine we taste the bitter sweetness of Jesus' suffering and of his love.

Tonight, physical humanity goes hand in hand with the broad range of human emotion.

This service's transition from love and intimacy to anxiety and confusion is an experience tragically familiar to people the world over, and we may recognise too Jesus' own sadness, isolation, fear and patient obedience.

As we move to the Vigil before the Altar of Repose, sitting in the darkness before the flickering lights of the candles, we recall how, when the disciples dozed off in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus reproached them with the words: "Could you not stay awake with me

one hour?" Struggling with human weariness as *they* did, we acknowledge the weakness of the human flesh which Jesus took upon him at his Incarnation, to come among us and share completely in our experience.

Yet the night will end with awe and reverence as we watch with Christ in anticipation of the dark hours of Good Friday, drawn ever deeper into an atmosphere of prayer and of self-giving.

In everything we do this evening, our spirits and our memories are enabled to engage with and keep alive this story which underpins our created life, our faith and our redemption in common with the whole of God's church, down the centuries and across the world - the narrative which binds all Christians together in the Body of Christ in spite of our apparent differences.

Jesus told us at the end of our Gospel reading today:

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Through this liturgy, may we be united in love and in our shared humanity, within this church and within the church universal, drawn together into the mystery of Christ's Passion.

Amen