

## Maundy Thursday 2020 St.Margarets Leigh on Sea.

### Homily 2020 - God in Ordinary

Over the last few days and weeks I suspect all of us have been regarding the ordinary things of life in a different way and more important than ordinary things – ordinary people in a different way. No doubt at some point tonight there will be noise and applause for those working for care homes, in hospitals, keeping our basic services in order and food supplied. Yet before this crisis we often took ordinary things and ordinary people for granted.

On this night Maundy Thursday Jesus gives us a mandate, a commandment “a new commandment I give you to love one another as I have loved you”. He is from God, he is the word made flesh and yet does not give commandments from afar. He is not a distant isolated commander he is in the thick of it and shows it in the humblest of ways. Jesus takes ordinary and familiar things and gives us a window into the heart of God through them. His teaching in parables constantly takes ordinary things and situations and shows us what the kingdom of God is like. He uses a mustard seed, a little yeast, a foreigner or outsider and we see things differently.

On Maundy Thursday we are shown the heart of God through ordinary things – some of them perhaps more familiar to the disciples than us and yet we use them to. Before the altar this Maundy Thursday I have placed a large bowl, jug, towel, and apron and on the other side an empty chair draped with a rather fancy looking tunic and scarf. Jesus on this night lays aside his dignity and does the most menial of things he washes feet – the task of the lowest of servants. He wears the towel and apron symbols of service uses the jug and bowl – he washes feet – he doesn't just utter a command but shows us. The apron – how it has taken on a different meaning for us this last few weeks an essential piece of protective equipment for those seeking to care for others in great need.

And then in contrast the fine scarf or stole and tunic – and yet they are meant to remind us of the garments of the servant – the deacon – which means servant in Greek. These garment are worn even by the pope under his greatest finery as the servant of the servants. These garments were worn by our queen at her coronation as a reminder that she is the servant of the people. Popes, Kings, Archbishops and Queens have through the ages washed the feet of ordinary folk in reminder of this through the ages.

What is menial is given holy meaning. It is embellished not just with embroidery and decoration like a fancy face mask we sometimes see, but with reverence due to the importance of real, dutiful, selfless service. An yet such meaning can be lost. Will the applause the bells and one-upmanship fireworks of Thursday night have real meaning

for us in a few months, years or decades to come? We will still value the ordinary after the crisis is past - it is a big question. That is why in Jesus culture they did things again and again and again – it's called ritual and we don't always like that word today – but it can be helpful if we are to really and truly remember and enact what is important in life.

The ritual for the disciples that night was the Passover meal. To be dutifully re-enacted each year to mark their freedom from slavery least they forget. It consisted of ordinary things, here present too, bitter herbs, salt water, bread, wine, no roasted lamb (sorry), and an empty chair, for them Elijah – for us some will have empty chairs in their houses this night which will have a different name on it and their tears will be salty and bitter. Familiar ordinary things – and Jesus gives them eternal and new meaning. The washing of feet is an action of service that will be eclipsed by his giving of his whole life and the taking bread and wine – “do this in remembrance of me” is a foretaste of that. We Christians are asked to do this frequently, to remember not just when it's in vogue or fashionable but daily and each Sunday.

Our bitter herbs are here represented by rosemary. This rosemary comes from a cutting from the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus goes into that same garden from this meal as we symbolically will do shortly, and it is bitter garden indeed. “Will you watch with me one hour” – the answer is no and they eventually “all foresook him and fled”. It is a bitter aloneness where many will feel themselves tonight. Jesus prays so fervently that sweat drops like clots of blood into the ground. He does not want to “drink this cup” to die serving the world but if it is God's will so be it. For Christians it is also the reversal of the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve have each other's company. In this Garden Jesus is alone from others but one with God – from this garden humanity is raised to God not separated.

God in Jesus gives everything – it is summarised in a few ordinary words “ a new commandment I give you love one another as I have loved you” yes ordinary words backed up by extraordinary action in human flesh and blood.

God in ordinary is God in action. Let us pray that we will not forget.