

**Holy Thursday 2005**  
Homily of March 24, 2005  
by Father Brian Timoney

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There are two points of focus for our celebration this evening, and they are intimately linked: Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and Jesus instituting the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Eucharist means thanksgiving, and it was instituted in the context of sharing the Passover Meal which itself is a feast giving thanks for an act of liberation. Moses led his people out of the slavery of Egypt to a new freedom in a new land. And Christians have always looked at Jesus as our Moses, leading us out of the stranglehold of petty legalisms to a greater sense of freedom in our relationship to God. He has removed the barriers between ourselves and God.

And we celebrate this freedom in Eucharist, where Jesus has left himself to be ever present to us. No barriers remain. Now there is only continuous Divine Presence, real and substantial. And we can rejoice and be glad in this new dispensation, in this new freedom to be with God and God with us. Prior to the moment when he said “This is my Body. This is my Blood. Do this in memory of me.” he had made a most significant gesture in washing the feet of the disciples. In this one dramatic moment he summed up his life and his message. “I have come not to be served, but to serve.” If I, your master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow so that, as I have done for you, you should do also. So, service and Eucharist are inextricably linked at the Last Supper and are inextricably linked at every Eucharist that we celebrate together.

The Passover Seder meal was a communal family meal and Eucharist is also. But “communal” does not mean just a number of bodies together in one room. It implies a number of minds and hearts and spirits together in one room, with a common purpose, to serve God in serving one another. Going beyond our own narrow personal focus to see and react to the needs of others in homes, at work, at school, on the street, this requires us to accept the scripture teaching that we are all one in Christ. And nowhere is this more powerfully shown than in the celebration of Eucharist, where we share the one bread and the one cup, and thereby, become one in him. Receiving Eucharist together is the greatest means of uniting and binding us together in Christ. How can we disrespect or neglect each other if we have shared his Body and his Blood? How could we do that?

What about those who do not share Eucharist with us? Well, Jesus reached beyond his own community, reached out to pagans, reached out to the Samaritans whom the Jews hated. And he would wish us to reach out to others. This would be part of the result of our sharing in Eucharist together, in our being united with Christ and with his spirit. To reach out to all, irrespective of their

beliefs, that is what Jesus would want.

Service to our fellow human beings is a sure sign that Eucharist is truly meaningful for us. Such service is not easy. Those who were washing the feet and kneeling, washing the feet, will attest to that. It's very hard on the knees. But service is very hard on us in many, many ways. It is not easy. And that's why we, all of us, need to be nourished frequently by the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Jesus in the sacred meal, strengthened by the presence of the Lord himself.

So, today, this evening, let us give thanks and praise and re-dedicate ourselves to the service of our fellow human beings. Amen.