

Holy Thursday

2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015

'Last Supper vs. Leaders' Debate'

Ex 12: the Passover instructions Ps 115: *the cup of salvation I will raise*

1Cor 11: *this is what I received and in turn passed on to you ...*

Jn 13: 1–15: *if I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.*

Being here at Mass this evening, this holy night of commemoration of the Last Supper, means we are missing out ... We're missing the long-awaited 7-way debate between the leaders of the main political parties in England Wales and Scotland as they jostle for position in preparation for the Election. But I know where I'd rather be! Here, gathered as the apostles were, around the table of the Lord, listening to His words of wisdom, love and forgiveness — than listening to the jockeying, sparring, and point-scoring of Mr Cameron, Mr Miliband, and the others. The host of the debate tonight, Julie Etchingham, is a devout Catholic ... she'd probably also rather be out of the political limelight tonight and enjoying this evening with Our Lord instead. Not that I am doing down our political system — we are lucky to live in a stable democracy at all; many of the world's population do not. As the recent re-burial of Richard III reminded us, our own country's history has been fraught and bloody too; we should be grateful that we live in a time and place of peace and not war. Yet we also despair sometimes of our political leaders and our political system, and

that's understandable. It's in great part because a strong belief in God, and in the God-given purpose of humanity is totally absent from their thinking and their policies. The Prime Minister, in his Easter message managed to reduce the Gospel to this:

*"I hope everyone can share in the belief of trying to lift people up rather than count people out. Those values and principles are not the exclusive preserve of one faith or religion. They are something I hope everyone in our country believes. That after all is the heart of the Christian message. It's the principle around which the Easter celebration is built. Easter is all about remembering the importance of change, responsibility, and doing the right thing for the good of our children. And today, that message matters more than ever."*

Mmmm ... rather a simple, sanitized view of Christianity, I'd say! Not exactly what Jesus would be saying at the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, Jesus talks of radical humble service; self-sacrifice; going to His death for His friends and all of humanity; the persecution that the apostles will suffer as they go out; the priestly office they have as they "do this in memory of Me"; the centrality of the Eucharist, the sacramental presence and memorial of His suffering, death and resurrection. The deep wisdom of the discourses of Jesus at the Last Supper provide a

perfect pattern for human living, and a perfect society.

Let me focus on the two great actions of Holy Thursday: the foot-washing, and the Eucharist. One is for us an example; the other, even greater, is a sacrament! It is a powerful act, when the Lord Jesus, Son of God, gets on His knees, pours water, and does the humblest of servile tasks, to wash the apostles' feet. St Peter resists Jesus humiliation, but Jesus corrects him — “I have to do this, or you have nothing in common with Me,” says Jesus. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” The Pope, this evening, at His Mass of the Lord's Supper in a Rome prison has washed the feet of twelve prisoners. And this action is copied across the Catholic world tonight. We must wash each other's feet. Many, repeated, faithful, humble acts of service; that's much of what a good life is made up of. Let's not get bored of humble service; let's see the Lord Jesus kneeling to serve, and ask for His grace to continue to do the same ourselves, especially in those moments of inner rebellion when we would rather walk away from those tasks.

The Eucharist, part II of the great actions of the Last Supper, is a continuation of Jesus's acts of humility, only this

time even more radical. He offers His whole self — body, blood, soul and divinity — in the forms of the Blessed Sacrament, the appearances of bread and wine, food of eternal life. God became man, and knelt to wash feet; yet in the Eucharist He stoops even lower, and places Himself even lower — the forms of simple food and drink — so that we can have such direct access to Him. Tomorrow, Good Friday, we will gather again to accompany Him to the perfect Sacrifice of the Cross; tonight He anticipates that, and gives His Church at the outset the greatest gift, which is Himself. All that He will offer on the Cross — all that He gives away by having His divine heart pierced open — He gives to us every day in the Holy Mass. We cannot be at the foot of the Cross in 30AD; we can't be there at the cave tomb as He rises; but we can be at Mass, where the same suffering, crucified, risen, and glorified Jesus is truly present.

These great lessons of the Last Supper, are worth more than any political wrangling, and can lead us to a good, holy, life of devoted service to our beloved God in Jesus, and to our neighbour in Jesus. Let us live our life deliberately and fully in imitation of Jesus, and in memory of Him. Let the Eucharist lead us to sacrifice our life for all that is truly good and godly.