

Holy Thursday

14th April 2022

'Triduum I, Cenacle: exemplum et sacramentum'

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.*

When Moses went before Pharaoh, for the first time, to initiate the Exodus, he told Pharaoh that the people of God were being called to make a 3-days' journey, firstly into the wilderness — a journey from slavery to salvation, from bondage to freedom. We too are going on a 3-days' journey, from Thursday night to Saturday night, also a journey of liberation. Physically, it's a very short journey, just a few hundred yards, really, criss-crossing Jerusalem, but spiritually it is a trek, an exodus, an epic journey from earth to heaven, from sin to forgiveness, from death to life.

We begin our sacred journey of 3 days in the higher city of Jerusalem, in that quarter of the old town known today as Mt Zion, at the Cenacle or 'Upper Room,' where Jesus gathered together, with such emotion, I'm sure, His 12 apostles for the Last Supper. When you go to the Holy Land (and I say "when," not "if," because I think it's such a precious thing — a remarkable insight — to go on

pilgrimage to the Holy Places ... I didn't go until I was 45, and now have been 4 times!). So ... *when* you go to the Holy Land, and make a visit to the Cenacle ... well, like so many places in Jerusalem, it's not as you might imagine it. (Visiting Lake Galilee in the north, one can imagine it's largely unchanged since the days of Christ ... but not so Jerusalem! But for the matter, it's not so surprising. Imagine Gower Street in 33AD ... when *Londinium* the Roman city hadn't even yet been founded!) The 'upper room' that pilgrims can visit today to commemorate the Last Supper is certainly an ancient structure, though not in Christian ownership, and in a compound that includes the so-called Tomb of David, though its being the actual tomb of King David is far from certain. So, what might one make of this location? It's about the size of this chapel, but it doesn't feel very church-like, and nor is Mass, I believe, ever allowed to be celebrated there. So, is this an unprepossessing start to our holy journey? No, not at all. When I've been there, the uppermost thing in my mind has been: here, or somewhere very near here in the upper city,

Jesus held that sacred gathering of His Church. (Recall anyway, those words of Jesus when conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well: the Jews were convinced one had to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem; the Samaritans held to their temple atop Mt Gerizim ... but Jesus said, the days were coming when true worship would be “in spirit and in truth” ... neither on Mt Gerizim, nor on My Zion.) When we go to the Cenacle to honour the Lord’s Last Supper, we do so precisely for a rite that originates there, teaching that starts off from there, but goes *from* there ... to the ends of the world. The rites, the sanctification, the commissioning, that take place at the Last Supper — whether in that modern-day Cenacle or in another nearby location — are given by Jesus to go elsewhere, *away* from that upper room, and into all the world. We are not trapped there: Jesus’s Gospel, example, and Sacrament, are not fixated on that place, wheresoever it precisely was.

Spiritually, though, we most certainly gather in close proximity to Jesus in the Cenacle tonight, for these most holy actions which express so much of His Gospel: the

love of neighbour in humble service, summed up in the washing of the feet; the commissioning of the apostles as the priests of the New Covenant (the sacrament of Holy Orders); and the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the first Mass, the re-imagined and elevated Passover, the new and highest-possible expression of our *love of God*. How intertwined these all are at that divine assembly. No wonder Jesus says, “I have longed with great longing to eat this Passover with you”; it begins the 3-days’ climax of so much of what His three years’ ministry had been about. And therefore what we hear of and celebrate this evening has to become fully embedded into our lives; these are not options or just pious suggestions — the *example* that Jesus gives (“serve one another as I have served you”), and the *Sacrament* that He gives (through priesthood and Eucharist) offering Himself to us in the Mass throughout the ages, as He offered Himself on the Cross, are both to be central to our lives. “*Love God*” and “*love neighbour*” are two sides of the same coin, as we know from the response Jesus gave when asked about the greatest commandment of

the Law. So likewise, we might suggest, the work of *charity*, serving one another humbly and lovingly with our whole lives, and the work of divine service, the *liturgy*, honouring God in the most perfect way He has given us in the Holy Eucharist, are also two sides of the same coin: we cannot have one without the other, and both comes from the lips, from the hands, and from the mind, of Christ, by way of the new commandment. Both express inseparably that one commandment which Jesus uses as the very motto for His saving ministry: “love one another as I have loved you.” Christ’s *example*, and Christ’s *Sacrament*, the two poles of tonight’s Last-Supper celebration, are both to be key ways in which we show love, love “as I have loved you,” love as Jesus Himself has taught us, as the Son of God, the very best teacher of human love.

Our 3-days’ journey, then, acquires its momentum and inspiration in Jesus’s love for us, His service of us as king-turned-servant, and as God-turned-priest. From this school of love (the upper room, the Last Supper, the first Mass), we learn again to trust fully in the lessons of the Master. So

we will follow Him, out of the Cenacle, into the night, to cross the Kidron Valley after supper to the Mt of Olives. This we will do in symbolic form as we process after Mass to the Altar of Repose, our own Garden of Gethsemane. As we process tonight we pray, and as we pray we wait, and we wait we pray again: *Lord, we love You, we follow You, we give ourselves entirely to being Your disciples, in our life’s most important work, that of following You.* Jesus’s greatest gift, His sacred presence in the Holy Mass: may this be an ever-present in our lives, for it is from the Holy Mass that we acquire the strength to follow where He leads us, on that journey which may turn out to be a way of the Cross. To set out on a journey is an exciting thing, and so tonight it is: it’s a renewed excitement, saying ‘yes’ to the journey of faith that is a lifetime’s adventure and gives a sacred purpose to life. May the Lord’s humble *example* and saving *Sacrament* be our constant accompaniment and sustain us every step of the way. He will not fail us as He leads us on: we can *absolutely* trust our divine guide, Jesus, as He steps forth ahead of us.