

DAY 6

I - LAST SUPPER

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When it comes to *listening to him, my beloved Son*, we need to pay special attention to the moment of impending separation from his disciples and to *listen* both to Jesus' **words** and to Jesus' **deeds** at his farewell dinner. But this **one deed** of his passion-death-resurrection is so comprehensive that it would easily take a life of prayer to consider all its aspects. Aside from time needed, it is simply not possible for us to grasp in one breadth the pain and sorrow of passion-death and the joy of resurrection. Even liturgically we need three days in Holy Week to cover the last supper, passion-death and resurrection. Surely, the Church could collapse it all into a single liturgy, after all it collapses into one liturgical year Jesus' entire life. But the fact remains that we cannot absorb it all at once. So perhaps it will be easier to focus now only on the last supper itself, leaving aside its preparation, and then focus on the discourses after that supper.

All four gospels narrate the last supper. The three Synoptics are pretty much parallel in their narratives, but they do not include the washing of the feet. John on the other hand does not include the institution of the Eucharist, his sixth chapter being his Eucharistic chapter, but he does include the washing of the feet. I will offer some reflections on four different events within the last supper, taking in consideration all four gospels: the meal itself, the washing of the feet, the announcement of betrayal and the institution of the Eucharist.

THE MEAL. In the Synoptics it was the Passover dinner that his disciples were asked to prepare. Jesus was a Jew and for any Jew the Passover celebration was loaded with memories of Israel's salvation history: liberation leading to covenant in the desert, to being declared God's people and to accepting that. For Jesus it is a moment of very heavy heart, a sense of impending suffering, aware that even at this point his disciples are not grasping the heart of his teaching –why, one of them is even planning to betray him for money! The disciples sense that something is not right, at least not right in human terms. There is a heaviness in the air and, as usual, they do not dare to ask, perhaps thinking that *what you don't know won't hurt you*. We should dare to ask the Lord: *what is going through your heart at this moment?* We need to look at the event from inside Jesus' heart, for this is more important than the specific externals of the situation. It is one of the clearest moments of intimacy between Jesus and his disciples.

THE WASHING OF THE FEET. *Knowing that the Father had put **everything** in his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God...* It was not a casual, superficial gesture done on the spur of the moment, but a clear message of freedom and of intentional choice: *He did not cling to his being equal to God [Phil. 2: 6]. **Everything** had been put in his hands*, including free acceptance and, yes, free refusal was also in his hands. We can see in Peter's reluctance our own reluctance to be freed, for freedom carries with it responsibilities we do not have when we are not free. Peter's claim of unworthiness misses the point, since Jesus frees us because of **his** worthiness, not because of any worthiness of ours. Jesus did not have to do that, he was free not to do it. Freedom to **do** something presupposes freedom **not to do** it and Jesus was free not to wash their feet. True freedom exists when we are free to surrender our freedom. And then Jesus tells them *do likewise*, be free to surrender your freedom not to wash one another's feet by exercising your freedom to wash them.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF BETRAYAL. What did Jesus see in Judas at first? Did Jesus take the initiative in calling Judas, or did he accept Judas' offer to follow him? At any rate, Jesus did choose Judas to be one of the twelve, one of the circle of close friends: *I have called you friends* [Jn. 15: 15]. Close friendship gives one the doubtful privilege of being able to hurt more: *were an enemy who insulted me, that I could bear... But you... a comrade and dear friend, to whom I was bound by intimate friendship...* [Ps. 55: 12-14]. Even in the non-religious sphere Julius Caesar expresses his deep hurt at being betrayed by one who was a close friend and a protégé: *you too, Brutus?* We need to have the trust and closeness to ask Jesus: *When did you become aware of Judas' plan? What was going through your heart then?*

EUCCHARIST. The breaking of the bread images the breaking of his body and the pouring of the wine images the shedding of his blood, an anticipation of the cost of Christ's freedom of choice, a cost we are called to share in. Jesus had a good sense of his going away and, wanting to stay, he came up with a novel way of being present. Such a key moment in our lives as Christians! Eucharist is remembrance –*in memory of me*, as the Passover celebration was remembrance for Jesus as a Jew. But Eucharist is also nourishment specified in the materials of the sacrament, precisely food and drink.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

LAST SUPPER

<i>Mt. 26: 21-35</i>	}	Last supper, Eucharist, Betrayal announced
<i>Mk. 14: 17-31</i>		
<i>Lk. 22: 14-38</i>		
<i>Jn. 13: 1-30</i>		Last supper... washing of the feet