

Holy Thursday / Mass of the Lord's Supper

2005

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

Ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

John 13: 1-15

Let the Church say....AMEN!

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When I was growing up, each holiday meant eating until you drop and many laughs at the expense of each other. However, nothing was funny about not being able to sit at the “big table”. My siblings and I were ALWAYS relegated to the “kid’s table”, where our purpose was to assist and serve the meal to the rest of the family. Moving to the “Big table” was a kind of rite of passage, a movement from childhood to adulthood in the family. If it ever be known, sitting at the “kid’s table” was *THE PLACE*, and provided us with many memories that my brother and sister and I cherish to this day.

Recently, the Today show had an etiquette guru that explained the proper way to set and sit people at a dinner table. He posits that you should always put the most high context person, or the most outgoing and extroverted person at the center of the festival table. Sitting in the center said something important about YOU! It mattered to a priest, prophet and king of long ago too!

In the most famous depiction of the Last Supper by DaVinci, and among others Jesus is sitting in the center of the table. The artist puts Jesus at this place of importance to draw people to Him, so that no one at the table will feel that they do not matter in his eyes, even those who would betray and deny him.

Jesus was not just a high context person, but one who had enough room in his heart to embrace all those who would dare to share a meal with the one they call Lord. He draws all to himself for the mission that would lead all who would believe in him to the blessing, commissioning, and peril of being a true follower of the One who would be with them for the end of time. No matter how big or small the Table, Christ desired all to have a seat and a place!

In our first reading from Exodus we learn how the people of old set their table and got ready to be in communion for table fellowship. The meal, according to the Jewish understanding, was a sign of peace, trust, and communality. The Passover meal incorporated the same basic structure of a meal: the words over the bread, its breaking and sharing; the words over the wine and its subsequent sharing. Tonight we will do the same, and so much more!

This night, we celebrate and share this memorial of his suffering and death not only to acknowledge the saving acts of God throughout history, but to also give oneself over to the Paschal Mystery and the New Covenant. Tonight, we are doing just that; affirming our God with us, a presence with us until the end of time, a presence we are commanded to bring to a hungry world.

This night, we say Amen to not only who we were in the past, but to where we are going

in the present and future. The big difference Christ made by offering himself to us, unlike when we were children who served the meal, is that it is HE who now serves us. He serves us to be his body for the world, to circumstances that need his presence and his life. Tonight we not only say Amen to his presence in the Eucharist, but also to one another as we become companions in the Cross and Resurrection still to come which offers us the irony of our faith: rebirth in suffering, solace from a simple meal with extraordinary repercussions.

Augustine, the great African bishop of long ago reminds us: “So, if it’s you that are the body of Christ and its members, it’s the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord’s table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so relying you express what you assent.”

Our Amen, our yes to Christ in this Eucharistic feast, is a yes to me and you.

Tonight our seat and place at the table are set. Someone gave it to you—Christ. It's not just about what's on the table, it's about who's around it. Who Jesus ate and drank with is just as important as what he was eating. That is what he meant when He said *DO THIS*, he meant, He will be present with those you truly love, despite all their faults, gather around a table and serve one another. On this night will gather around this table to remember what our God does around small gatherings, and what we should do as we leave this table in covenant with one another. Yes, this night we are served by him, and now fed by him to be the living and credible sign of his presence to our world.

So now Christ gives us a command: “As I have done so you must do.” We come this night to remember what he said and did, so that we may do the same!

This night as his Body (rich, poor, black, white, gay and straight, and every pendulum on the political sphere) the command is still the same as it was in the upper room. Our great Teacher and Savior showed the greatest of hospitality. He stooped low, girded himself and washed the feet of his disciples as an example and command. Tonight we are washed by a great host to who demands that after we celebrate this meal that we wash and feed one another.

No matter how big or small the table may be, the reality is the same, we say Amen to feeding one another for this journey of faith and to building up one another to be Christ for this world. I say not only Amen to bread and wine, but to you as we journey together towards our blessed fulfillment!

So on this night let the Amen resound in this place, and let us acclaim around this table: We can, we will, and so let the Church say (hands extended) Amen!