

+One evening, while putting her daughter Carla to bed, author Elizabeth Debeasi, asked her what it was like to be four years old. She said, "It's special." "Why is it special?" She responded, "It's special because I know you love me." What a profound thought said the author! "If I'd only take the time, I could see like Carla that life is special because my heavenly Father loves me."

That is what Jesus shows us in this feast of the Last Supper, how much we are forever loved by him and what that love should mean to all of us gathered here this evening.

I. It is said that on this night came the institution of the priesthood. Men who have devoted their lives to God and His people, "In good times and bad, in sickness and health, to love and honor each of you."

Our priests are not so unlike the Apostles in that we struggle as they did before the cross of Christ suffering – the suffering we experience in this world as people question us as to why when a child dies?

Why did this happen to me, to my mom, dad, a friend? But he gave us a model and the Holy Spirit, to bring his healing power, because that is what we do, that is our calling. We sit next to you.

Jesus tells his priests, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." It is to be a model of service.

Someone once pointed out that the stole symbolizes union with Christ in the Eucharist, and the towel symbolizes union with humanity by service. The priest is called upon to be united with the Lord in the Eucharist and with the people as their servant.

II. With the priesthood comes the gift of the Eucharist, described for us in today's second reading.

Sadly, many fail to understand what he has been done for us. I've been told from one that they haven't been around much, because their passion is now training for running or another, yoga. Yes, in the place of the Son of God. Others find the teachings of the Church just too much.

Jesus certainly experienced this. They would leave him because his teaching was too difficult or that he they must lose their life to find life....to leave their possessions and to follow him. And, of course, most of his disciples left him on this night out of fear when things were not going well for the miracle maker.

Jesus understood what it means to be abandoned, to be alone. The Eucharist is his promise that we are never alone and from this Eucharist comes the Body of Christ that surrounds us in one another.

When the priest consecrates the wine and bread into his body and blood, he is not only asking that the bread and wine be changed into the reality of Christ, he is also, and just as much, asking that the people present, the congregation, be changed into the body and blood of Christ.

St. Augustine tells the neophytes who are about to receive communion: "Be what you see, and receive what you are."

What Jesus wanted to give us at the last supper was not just his presence and God's forgiveness under the species of bread and wine, but that same reality in the faces, hands, and bodies of those who partake of that bread and wine.

At a Eucharist, we, not just the bread and wine, are meant to change.

John tells us that Jesus washes the disciples' feet. This story is unique to John's Gospel. He wants to tell us what the Eucharist really means and what it invites us to do: To become the living, loving gift of Christ in the Eucharist.

It is precisely in the give and take of loving one another that the Eucharistic presence of Jesus emerges from the tabernacle and becomes palpable in ordinary daily life: in our forgiving, in our loving, in our caring for one another.

III. And so John tells us on this night, Jesus rose from supper and humbles himself in a way that his followers would not completely understand until after the Feast of Pentecost.

Jesus stepped down from his seat of glory to wash the feet of creatures he has made. He - whom the angels adore in heaven. He - before whom every knee bends in heaven and on earth and under the earth, kneels at these feet.

Not clinging to the robes of divinity, Jesus removed his garment - just as the soldiers would do at his crucifixion. He knows that his life will end by underserved violence over the next day.

In stooping to serve his disciples Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of them and that the rest would abandon him. Such knowledge could have easily led to bitterness or hatred.

But Jesus would meet the injury of betrayal and the lack of loyalty with the greatest humility and supreme love. He would even wash the feet of Judas. Jesus forgave those who betrayed him, those who denied him and those who would kill him.

He loved his disciples to the very end. He loved everyone to the very end. Like he loves each of us. Unconditionally. And thus he says to us: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."