

April 1st, 2021 John 13:1-17,31b-35 Holy Thursday,

Dinner with friends.

Here we are at Holy Week one of the most pious and reverent times in the Church calendar. We have had Jesus spending time in the desert, to Him recently riding in on a donkey colt with exaltation, but soon the story is going to take a shift.

As I reflect on today's Gospel several things come to my mind:

Few of us knew, at this time last year, the events that would happen that would plunge many of us into a year long and still going desert experience. Pandemics where things of the movies and the past, though experts may have warned us, did any of us ever think it would happen

in our lifetime? And the struggle of loneliness, isolation, and fear for many has been extremely real and for some staying isolated maybe the new norm. We just on some level did not see it coming.

But here in today's Gospel we have Jesus who knows what is exactly coming in his life in the days ahead. What would you do if you knew that your last days on Earth were so near and would come in a brutal and violent way? Or would we do what Jesus did, gather your tribe of closest friends and go to dinner?

Great artists have tried to capture the true nature of what the Last Supper must have been like, the most famous maybe Leonardo DaVinci's, where the Apostles were gathered around looking and listening with great intent

on every last word. But I keep feeling a different sense of the scene and the story.

One of the things that I myself have missed throughout this last year was going to meet friends for a meal out. What for a long time seemed like a nice norm has now become a great treat as some of us venture out a bit more in gathering with friends for a meal.

Of course, the Last Supper for us today also represents the rituals of the Holy Eucharist that we at New Song practiced on a regular basis almost every Sunday.

Another tradition that most of us long to be able to do again. But I keep feeling a different sense of the scene and the story of the Last Supper dinner party.

What would we do if we really knew what lay ahead in the rest of the days of our lives? Some of us may take out every last cent and blow it...You Only Live Once.... Some of you may call your attorney, financial planners, trust officers, undertakers and your pastoral teams and make sure every I is dotted, and every T crossed, we might not be able to take it with us, but I am going to be sure it is handled the way I want it to be. Others of us may just take to our beds and wait it out or pray for God's forgiveness and redemption.

Some of us may do what Jesus did and gather our tribe and have a meal. How would going to dinner with friends be different if we knew what Jesus knew that evening?

Today figuring out a dinner for thirteen people would include seemingly hundreds of emails or text about where to go, what time to meet, who was going to make the reservations, who to invite, who not to invite, how to make sure that some one did not feel left out. Then at the arranged time and place who sits next to who, what part of the conversation can you hear, what part of the conversation you cannot hear and what part of a conversation you are apart of and what part of a conversation you wish you were a part of? And maybe what friends are getting a long and what friends at the moment may not be getting along.

Human relationships, friendships, communities, and the emotions around them are complex dynamic entities. Close friends talk to each other about each other, about our strengths, our weaknesses, our kindness our when

we think each other has totally flipped out and are in the deep end of what is going on in our lives. And sometimes we may accidentally overhear or get the email what friends are talking and saying about us accidentally in our inbox. Or, when buttons are pushed you may get told to your face what all of your flaws are.

No matter how hard we may try not to do that, or think it is wrong, it is just human nature to be judgmental.

Great minds have studied these complexities of human nature each coming up with their own theories of how it works and why we are wired that way we are. But for me on some level it makes the expectations of friendships a bit easier if I understand at times I am going to be judge and sometimes I am going to be judged. As one friend, years ago reminded me, in relationships there

are two sides to every story and some truths to both sides.

So how does this make me see the scene of the Last Supper differently. Remove our piety, or sense of the foretelling of what would become our sacramental norm of the Eucharist, take away the imagination of great artist who were not there and paint the picture of thirteen very human friends out to dinner. Friends gathered together as humans, only one was the son of God born into human flesh, but his followers all possessed the same foibles of our own friendships and relationships today. Some will betray us, some will deny us only to ask for our forgiveness later, some will doubt us, some will follow us only to fall asleep and not see what agony we are going through at the very moment we may need them most. Remember the Apostles have not yet been

anointed with tongues of fire to go spread the word of the Good News that is a different season coming up.. They were just gathering together like they had done many times before. Only one of them knew what was coming and what did he do that night amongst the conversations of his friends. Did he abandoned them for their humanness and say you are not worthy to be my friends or my followers? No, he wrapped a towel around his waist and in one last act of intimacy he washed their feet

If we knew when our last day on Earth was going to be would we add showing one last act of intimacy to the people in our lives to our list of what we needed to get done? But even in this moment of Jesus's love for the Apostles some could not bring themselves to allow Jesus to wash their feet easily. Jesus had to encourage them in

some way with why this was important for them and the life ahead of them and the life in the kingdom of heaven. And then Jesus reminds us once again his greatest commandment of love. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

We have had many discussions of love this Lenten season. From the dilemma of social, racial and class injustice, to our addiction to violence, to those who believe in a violent God to what it means to be Christian.

Relationships, friendships, and communities to be meaningful take work not unlike Jesus they will require us to take off the outer robe put a towel around our waist and to do the humble work of making sure that the people know that we care. And as people, hopefully

soon, start to be able to come out of isolation I hope through our love and our love of God and God's love of us that they will start to feel again the intimacy and beauty of a simple act of kindness a reconnection to community and friendships that may have felt lost or forgotten.

Having been a part of foot washing at New Song in the days when we could gather on Holy Thursday, I know the intimacy of having your feet washed, and washing someone else's feet. It made you connect to someone in away you would never do at any other time. Think of how powerful it must have felt to have your feet washed by Jesus.

I am never sure if it is fortunate or unfortunate that I will not know the hour that I will die and whether it will be

peaceful or violent. I do know that it will not take long for the memory of me to fade from this planet, but I do believe I will have a fascinating live after this one in God's kingdom. I am fairly sure when a larger group of my friends and I could gather again for a meal if I showed up with a towel around my waist and bowl and a pitcher of water to wash their feet that most, if not all, of my friends would balk at allowing me to do that and the restaurant would most likely throw me out. So instead, I will relish in the cacophony of conversation, the beauty and uniqueness of each character and personality and because I do not know the hour I will die, I will rejoice in God's love for me, God's love for them and God's love for all of us.

We can now return to solemnity, piety, and reverence of Holy Week. And all of God's Children say Amen

