**Maundy Thursday, Apr. 2, 2015; Ex 12:1-;1 Cor 11:23-26;14;Ps 116**

It's dinnertime now. Sharing in a meal is an important part of our relationships, with friends and family. When we visit with a friend, we often make arrangements to have them over for a meal or to meet them in a restaurant for a meal. It is often over food that we listen, connect, share, care. As we munch, we go deeper with each other, we are honest with each other, we build trust.

Tonight, we celebrate the special meal that Jesus instituted this night, the night before He died--this is not a meal to satisfy our physical hunger, but rather our spiritual hunger. This is the meal that is all about our relationship with Jesus, for through it we receive His real presence, His love. It is something that Jesus commanded us to partake in; the word "Maundy" means command. On the bottom of page 362 in the BCP in Eucharistic Prayer A, it says "**On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread....Do this for the remembrance of me"** and "**After supper he took the cup of wine.... Do this for the remembrance of me.**" These words, that you hear each week, are from the Bible; we heard them in tonight's reading from St. Paul), ***"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."***

It is called "the Eucharist" because it is a meal of thanksgiving: thanksgiving for what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is one of the Great Sacraments of the church because it is for ALL. It is observed in community ALWAYS; Eucharist is never received alone. It is all about us, together, meeting in God's holy name, receiving the nourishment, receiving the strength, receiving the divine within us. Our Catechism tells us about the Eucharist, turn to page 859. It says, "**this is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which He invites us to....himself**." At the bottom of the page and the top of the next one, the benefits of the Eucharist are given: **"forgiveness of sins, strengthening our union, and foretaste of eternal life."** In the Eucharist there is a deep gift of unconditional love, there is healing power. In our Gospel tonight Jesus said, "***love one another; even as I have loved you that you also love one another***.”

Jesus' love given to us in the Eucharist, and also demonstrated on this night as He washed the disciples feet. In the foot washing, Jesus bends to the feet of each of the disciples - with the smells, the dirt, the corns, the dry cracked skin, the ingrown toe nails..

When I think of feet, I am immediately taken back mentally to a hospital scene in Los Angeles 20 years ago. For several days, I stood at the foot of Jim's father's hospital bed; his feet were kicked out of the covers. His well worn feet stuck out. I had many hours to observe his feet, as the family was gathered around him -- it turned out that this was his deathbed. His feet were so full of calluses and wear, I pondered about all the work and experiences those feet had been through. Yes, I remember those feet. Family members gently touched those feet during our vigil there, transmitting compassion and caring.

Can you picture Jesus there on the floor, gently holding the disciples' feet? Touch, full of love. Jesus poured warm water slowly over their feet, cleansing them, then maybe massaging them a little, then rinsing them, toweling them dry. We know, as Jesus went through those motions, He was praying for each of them, praying, praying, praying for what was to come. Jesus said, "***love one another; even as I have loved you that you also love one another***.” When we receive the bread and wine, we are being touched by Jesus. As we hold out our hands, we hold Jesus' love. We consume the morsel of consecrated bread and wine, and with that inner touch we are filled with the light and love of Christ.

On this special night in the church, immediately following Holy Communion, consecrated bread and wine will be consumed. The only remaining presence of Christ, in one piece of consecrated bread, will be carried from the church to the altar of repose, for those who chose to pray on this holy night, remembering Jesus' praying in the garden of Gesthemane. You are invited to pray as Jesus begged His disciples to do: “***Stay awake with me, watch and pray***.” [ This one remaining host will be consumed tomorrow morning, and there will be no Holy Communion until Easter Sunday.] Then the altar will be stripped -- all symbols and reminders of Christ’s presence in His church here – will be removed. This culminates in the washing of the altar, where we ponder what it must have been like to be on the sidelines that day as Jesus journeyed to the cross - washing His blood. Our darkness will be broken Sunday morning by the glorious light of his resurrection.

On this night, this holy night, we are filled with gratitude for Christ sacrifice for us and for His feeding us with His Holy and life-giving presence. Let us then prepare with joy to eat this bread and drink his cup, which we will not enjoy again until his resurrection. Amen.