

Text: I Corinthians 11

For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.

So, say you're nominated for an academy award- or for whatever honor your particular craft or club or college or sports team might offer- if you are nominated- or in the running- when do you start writing your acceptance speech? Athletes have to imagine themselves winning. Students need to study so that they can take up the blue book- or whatever form tests come in these days with real confidence. Politicians need to project a sense of accomplishment and suggest a gathering momentum surging towards victory.

And the flip side is as familiar- the transfer student feels out of place in a classroom full of long established relationship and social hierarchies. Someone is bound to be warming the bench- able to make the team, but not to make the first string. The industry shifts, the economy plummets, and the job is gone. Background, economic status, race, gender- we can find ourselves in the midst of communities where we are an outsider- we can mistrust our right to stand up and speak.

Peter is offended that Jesus kneels before him - no thanks, no need to disrupt the structure of things on my account- I am the disciple, you the Lord- and I'll just sit here- and you just sit there. It could be respect- but it sounds like he wants a scheme that gives room to climb.. I may not be the top, but I want there to be a top.

Somehow, in a conversation that seems to be disjointed or perhaps not quite completely remembered- Peter changes- not just my feet but my hands, and my head- wash it all- . It is not enough to do what is asked- even in letting Jesus kneel and wash his feet- even in humility- even in being served- Peter wants to excel enthusiasm replaces reticence.

Jesus isn't interested in either.

Tonight brings us to this table- to this place where grace is poured out like cool refreshing water over weary feet- and where Jesus himself takes up a towel and begins to serve us- to provide for us a banquet and a welcome beyond any earthly reward or recognition.

If this is what we say it is - what He says it is- then all the world's certificates and titles, all the prizes and hard-won victories- nothing outshines the beauty and the abundance of what we are given here. Not ephemeral rewards- not and even the hard realities of economy and social structure- nothing reaches deeper into the very structure of life itself- God's own life- our own need and hunger. We hold out our hands and receive the bread of life and take the blood by which earth, sea and skies are cleansed and healed.

By what we give and receive here, we are drawn into the very life of Christ- as he offers himself to the Father even through death- and as he breaks through the darkness of death. What can compare with this great gift?

So how do you prepare for this? God has no need of our neurotic and paralyzing fear or shame. For everyone- there is somewhere that we feel out of place, out of step, unwelcome. But not here- we are here because Jesus asks us to be here. No matter what sorrow or sin weighs on us- we are welcomed here.

Still there is no room here for pride- for the self-delusions that we are already all God would have us be. *Our* feet aren't dirty- we have socks and shoes on thank you very much, they might need their feet washed, but I'm fine, really. Push a bit deeper and there is the usual mix of greed and spite, of resentment and petty anger- we are too easily frightened and too quick to threaten. We turn away from God imagining that we can manage our life far better and other's as well. We neglect those who depend on us and we disregard those we should heed. Our feet are clean, but our souls

and our hearts- our lives are scarred and dusty and calloused and dirty.

If we could not ask forgiveness, and if we did not trust in the grace given in our baptism -- we wouldn't have any business being here, and if we don't ask forgiveness and don't trust God's grace, then we're not quite ready.

Grace abounds in this Sacrament- our gifts are offered, received, blessed and given back to us- and in that we see something of Christ's own offering of himself to the Father. We see Christ's body- offered at the altar- and gathered around the altar- and sent out. Relationships between God and humanity- between each of us and God and among us- as well- are healed and restored - only for a moment- but in a moment that encompasses eternity, even as these gifts encompass the giver.

We are warned not to eat and drink without discerning the body. If we do not fall in awe before the Presence of the Christ in whose death we find life and whose life is continually given to us- we are judged. If we do not recognize in each other- and in ourselves- the Image of God and members of Christ's Body- we are judged.

We are judged and found wanting- we are weak and our faith dies. So do not come without stopping to think where the path

leads- what you must leave behind- what you seek and what you will take with you. Do not come without knowing what is asked of you and what great gift is to be placed in your hand and taken into your body. Jesus intends to be known in this action. We are in the presence of a mystery we will never exhaust- grace abounding and cause for holy fear and humble awe.

Jesus knows us well- even as he knew the hearts that would betray and abandon him- and still he got up and quietly began to wash their feet- brushing aside Peter's resistance and his desire to over-achieve. He takes the bread - blesses it- and breaks it and gives it to those who will take it. Jesus knows us well- and if we can make this one last act of discernment- and know our body- our self- as he knows us- welcomed and forgiven, often weak and confused- yet called to work and to strive for the kingdom- empty handed - yet capable of making an offering that extends his own perfect offering- if we can know ourselves in him- then we have discerned the body- and judgment becomes the medicine of healing- and this sacrament is strength for the journey and a foretaste of the journey's end.

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