

Holy Thursday - March 30, 1972 - Seminary

We celebrate in these holy days the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The passage of the Lord from death to life is the memory, and these rites are the act of remembering, that make us the people of a new covenant, a holy nation, God's chosen people, proclaiming the mighty deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his own marvellous light. We recall the events in which Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, was made both Lord and Messiah, and in discovering our Lord, we discover ourselves as the Church.

As the New Testament readings for this service make clear, we attend upon the founding of the Church, the giving and the revelation-in-the-giving of what makes the Church the Church. For we hear in these readings of the service of the Lord. In the Gospel, we see Jesus, Teacher and Lord, rise from table and stoop to the service of his disciples. Peter protests, for as yet he does not understand; death and resurrection will make it clear what Jesus does. But when he persists in his protest, he is answered by the word of the Lord: "Unless I wash you, you will have no part with me." As so often, Peter stands for the disciples, uncomprehending, still having to make their own transition from the way men think to the way God thinks, having now to accept their Lord in the form of a slave.

We are Peter, and we are not differently placed. And neither do we have part with Christ--we are not his Church--except we permit him to wash our feet, which means unless we accept him as never more our Teacher and Lord than in his lowly service as a slave. Letting him wash our feet involves the whole Gospel--revolution that is faith, accepting his word which makes us clean. All the splendid symbols of John's Gospel--light and darkness, freedom and bondage, life and death, truth and falsehood--all of them are concentrated in this simple gesture, and the whole question of our being in the light, and free, and alive, and walking in the truth turns upon our letting the Lord be in our midst as the servant of all.

It is no other lesson we learn from the reading from Paul: the Lord offers us bread, but it is his Body which is for us; he offers us a cup which is the new covenant in his Blood. It is a meal that creates a fellowship, but the bread we break and the cup we bless give fellowship in a broken body and out-poured blood; it is a death we remember until he come: such is the memory and hope that make us one in Christ Jesus.

But such faith is not all that makes us the Church. For the Lord's service is not something to which we may look back in detached fashion: the Lord's service is not really received except as a demand upon us. "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example: you are to do as I have done for you." It is the new commandment he has given us, that we love one another as he has loved us. He is not Lord for us, for we are not his disciples, unless we understand ourselves as servants, too. We are to serve one another, not only as he served us, but because he served us, because we are the creatures of his service, alive with no other life than that which comes from his death, having no other glory than that of his cross.

That, too, is the lesson of the bread we break and the cup we bless: because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body, the Lord's body. And part of that duty of discerning the Lord's body that Paul said is necessary if we are not to eat and drink condemnation upon our selves, is discerning ourselves, one another, the Church, as the Lord's body, not members of him without being members of one another, the pain of one the pain of all, the joy of one everyone's joy, anyone's need everyone's need.

These are not new truths for us; and if we neglect them, we may not even claim Peter's excuse, for the death and resurrection are behind us. Still, we find ourselves having again to acknowledge how imperfect and fragile is our life in Christ. As imperfect, it calls always for the same repentance that gave it rise; and as precarious, it has always to be founded anew in the same faith that first permitted the Lord to cleanse us by his word. It is such repentance and faith that we are about this night and these days. This night is not different from all other nights except for such repentance and faith; and the Lord's death and resurrection remain events of another time and place except as the mysteries of our own repentant and trusting hearts. Let us permit the rhythm of these days to become the rhythm of our repentance and faith, dying with him who was handed over for our sins, rising with him who was raised for our justification.

Good Friday - March 31st, 1972 - CNR

This service in celebration of the Lord's Passion unites the several aspects of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The text from Isaiah gives the classic description of "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," "the lamb led to the slaughter," bearing our infirmities, enduring our sufferings. With the 21st Psalm, it is the chief Old Testament text for a Christian's meditations on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

The Liturgy refuses, however, to indulge in moaning recollection of Jesus' suffering. St. John's account of the Passion is read, and in no other is it so apparent that Jesus is the active one, not a reluctant victim, but a king who knows fully his hour has come to pass from this world to the Father, a king who has come into the world to testify to the truth, a king who is not ironically but really "the King of the Jews." And that perspective is taken up by the hymns in veneration of the cross: "We worship you, Lord, we adore your cross and praise your resurrection: for through the cross you have brought joy to the world." The instrument of disgrace and torture has become the victory-banner of a triumphant procession.

Finally, there is the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, the description of our high priest, able to sympathize with our sufferings, because he himself was tempted in all things. And this is to present the priestly dimension of the cross, Christ's death not an execution but a sacrifice, the pouring of the blood which has cleansed us of our sin, the blood which Christ presents to his Father in the heavenly sanctuary, where he lives forever to make intercession for us. And union with that priestly prayer of Jesus the Church seeks through the general intercessions we make, the oldest form of the prayer of the faithful, our attempt to speak out the needs and desires of the people purchased by Christ's sacrifice.

It is to all these dimensions of Christ's passion that the Church seeks to reach communion, through the bread he broke with his disciples, the bread that is his Body, broken for us, raised from the dead, the center and principle of the life we possess as his Church. By our faith and love let the bread of the Eucharist we receive now be the reception of the full blessings of our crucified King and Priest.

Easter Vigil - April 2, 1972 - CNR

The whole of a Christian's religious experience centers upon this night. In this celebration are concentrated the great symbols of the old Testament experience - creation and restoration, Exodus and covenant, water and light, death and resurrection. Out of the mystery we recall have

sprung the New Testament's redefinitions of death and life, folly and wisdom, weakness and strength, defeat and victory.

But, if the Easter mystery is the sum and center of the religious tradition in which we stand, it is no less the center and concentrated meaning of our own personal religious experiences. The biblical images and symbols would have no appeal, would not be valid, were they not also the embodiment of the drama of our lives before God and neighbor. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would not be celebrated were they not the mystery of our lives also.

That is clearest this evening in the reading we have heard from Paul's letter to the Romans, where he draws out at length the parallel between Christ's death and resurrection and the Christian's baptism. Baptism means a death and burial, essentially the same death and burial Jesus underwent, death to sin, once for all. And baptism means also resurrection, renewal, the end once and for all of death's power, our ability to walk in newness of life, and a promised ultimate resurrection.

That careful parallel, I suppose, has lost much of its original force for us who were not baptized as adults. Its impact is felt, nevertheless, in important moments of religious experience, when one is given to see one's life in its true light, when one experiences something like real death to what was evil in it, when one has real sense of resurrecting power that is not one's own. There are moments in which one is more acutely aware of what it means to be a Christian, of how much it might cost, and one finds oneself still saying Yes and now struggling for the deeds worthy of the will. This is not magic; it is the stuff of our spiritual existence, the self-same struggle Paul was describing.

All of these memories and hopes come together in this night's celebration. The celebration, embodying the memory, grounds the hope. The power we proclaim in victory, that raised Jesus from the dead, raises us yet. It raises us in hope, confident that the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead can yet work his wonder of life out of death, of strength in weakness, of evil overcome, of dawn breaking in upon the darkest of nights. For the memory we say "Amen", for the hopes, "Yes"; and our simple prayer only brings us back again to the Lord Jesus: "He is the Yes pronounced upon all God's promises. That is why, when we give to God, it is through Christ Jesus that we say 'Amen'".

Holy Thursday-April 11, 1974-Seminary

The account of the Washing of the Feet seems to contain two different but related interpretations of the event. The first draws our attention to Christ, the second focuses rather on the Church of his disciples. If the first therefore is basic, the second is not less important, for great events are not great if they have no consequences or implications.

The first interpretation of the foot-washing is found right in the description of it, especially in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. We may again be grateful for Peter, for here as often elsewhere he stands as the seemingly eager, but really uncomprehending disciple--for someone like us, then--who may seek to follow after Jesus but keeps running up against incredible truths and impossible demands.

"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" is Peter's protesting question; and it is met with Jesus' simple reply that there is mystery here, which it will take his death and resurrection and especially the gift of the Spirit to unlock. Peter, of course, has no patience for mystery: "You

shall never wash my feet!" but this time his proud humility is met by a terrifyingly direct word of Jesus: "If I do not wash you, you will have no share in my heritage." And Peter is immediately swept up into a newly enthusiastic faith, "Then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."

Obviously, there is more than the washing of feet going on here--not to be washed by Jesus is to lose one's part in his heritage. We suddenly see that we are in the presence of another "sign," and understand that we have here John's symbol of the self-emptying of Christ in slavery even to the point of death. Jesus divests himself of his own clothing for that of a slave, bows to a slave's task and carries it out in humility. We see finally that it is his death which he is symbolizing, and our washing in his blood. Nothing less than this is the truth of this scene; and so Peter's protest is now more than an overzealous humility--it is the protest of sinful man, who in his pride will not be washed in the blood shed by the One who loved him to the end.

Peter's protest reflects the vision of this world, and so the scene develops the contrast between the ways and thoughts of man and those of God--"If I do not wash you, you will not share in my heritage." There was no other way for Jesus to gain his inheritance, and no other way for man to have a part with him. Peter, and in him we ourselves, must leave behind the world's view of things, of God, of man, and of the ways of God with man, if we are to accept Jesus; and we delude ourselves if we believe that we have any relationship with him that does not begin with and remain always centered upon the fact that we have been washed clean in his blood.

In this light we can now understand the second interpretation, given when Jesus speaks of what he has done. In the language of the scholars, his instruction is an example of the imperatives of the Christian life arising out of the indicative of Christ's act. "If I washed your feet, I who am your Teacher and Lord, then you must wash each other's feet." Washed in the blood of their Teacher's sacrifice, how can his disciples not sacrifice themselves for one another? Not to serve one another is to admit to having another Teacher and Lord than Jesus Christ; to be any other kind of community is not to be his Church. And that, of course, is why so much of our celebration--especially in our representation of the footwashing--will concentrate on the great commandment of love. For this is the simple and immediate implication of having been loved to the end by Jesus Christ: "Love one another, as I have loved you."

As the Church, we always stand somewhere between the two moments described by these two interpretations--between the confession of what God has done in Jesus Christ and the living out of its implications in our lives. The question is very simple: Favored, shall we favor? Forgiven, shall we forgive? Served, shall we serve?

It is particularly appropriate for such questions to arise tonight and in this particular assembly. For this is the night on which in the early Church penitents were reconciled; and this is an assembly in a seminary, and there are no persons to whom these words of Jesus are more directly addressed than to priests and seminarians.

For we either already exercise or soon will exercise roles that will place us over and against the Church as her servants, representatives of Christ for her sake. And we should not delude ourselves into thinking that the temptations that come with leadership will not fall upon us, or that we shall in general any more successfully resist them than have done or do others. This simple act of Jesus, and the many other Gospel texts about his service, most surely teach that the root of the corruption of authority into self-righteous or self-indulgent authoritarianism is forgetfulness of one's own situation before God as a sinner before whom Christ did not hesitate to take the part of a servant.

The proud humility of Peter has not gone out of the Church nor out of us, and once at

least it might be well for us to shift the focus of our reflections on the priesthood, traditionally associated with this night, from the institution of the Eucharist to the washing of the feet. The first can be understood and abused as "power," the second cannot be; and it might be well to begin with the latter, for there should be no other teachers in the Church except those who have learned the truth of things, not only at the feet of Jesus, but by seeing Jesus at their own feet, their Teacher and Lord a slave before them.

It is the celebration of this mystery of love that we are about in these next days. Let us admit that there is a good deal of Peter in us still, protesting the thought of a suffering, servant-Messiah, because of the inescapable conclusion that the disciple is not greater than the Teacher. And let us realize that what is at stake is the ultimate truth of things--how God stands to man, how man to God, how evil is to be met and conquered, how I am to give shape and meaning to my life. So entering into the sacred mystery, we may expect at last to understand what otherwise must be rejected--that in death lies life, in self-forgetting self-finding, and in the figure of an impotent slave the Lord and Teacher of all.

Good Friday - April 12, 1974 - CNR

The mood of the Church's worship today is solemn, even severe, but it is not mournful. Isaiah may tell us in prophecy of the sufferings of the just man, but before and after he tells us that this "servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted," that "if he give his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him." If the letter to the Hebrews speaks of the high priest who can sympathize with our own weakness, having been tempted in every way, of his having offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to God, it also says that "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

But it is in John's Passion-account that the triumph of Christ is especially emphasized. Though he stands on trial, though he is condemned to death in a judicial procedure, still Jesus is throughout the King of the Jews; he himself is the judge; and his condemnation is the judgement of those who condemn him. His last breath on the cross is the handing over of the Spirit, and from his body, surrendered to death, flows forth the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.

Let us take our own spirit of prayer from the mood of the liturgy. Let us not listen to the voices of condemnation and the cries of derision, but to his voice who said, "Father, forgive them," "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Let us not gather in mourning, but in quiet triumph: "We worship you, Lord, we venerate your cross and praise your resurrection, because by the wood of the cross you have brought joy into the world?" Let us not regret an execution, but give thanks for a sacrifice. Let us not think of hate and injustice, but of love and forgiveness. So praying, we may expect once again to receive from the Lord's death the Spirit of life and freedom, the new creation of God's wisdom revealed in folly, of his power effective in weakness.

Easter Vigil - April 14, 1974 - C.N.R.

A few lines from the reading we have heard from Paul's Epistle to the Romans concentrate all the meaning of the multiple symbolism of light and Exodus and new hearts and

the fresh water of the Spirit with which we have begun. "We know that Christ, once raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no more power over him. His death was death to sin, once for all; his life is life for God. In the same way, you must consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." That is what we are celebrating, the once-and-for-all of God's act in Christ and the victory it promises us who believe.

Death and sin are no small enemies. Sin corrodes our lives even while we live them; death casts a shadow of dissolution back upon our most vital and energetic activities. We do not speak about insignificant matters when we talk of sin and death, and we make no small claim when we proclaim that they have been overcome in the Lord Jesus. They are not strangers to us, these two, sin and death; but the faith expressed this night is that there is something else we may meet, a forgiveness that can dissolve sin and a love stronger even than death.

We have enough experience of the one pair, sin and death; today we are given to rest peacefully in the joyful confidence that they are not the only word, for we are rebuked for "seeking the living One among the dead. He is not here; he has been raised up." It is the one great and utterly new thing in history--One who lives, who is not among the dead, who is not here. Is not where? Is not here, the "here" that is defined by hatred, selfishness, lust, despair, alienation--for this is the region of living death, and death has no more power over him. If not here, then where? Not far off, that someone may say, "'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down); but "near you, on your lips and in your heart," (Rom 10: 7-8), in the heart that receives the word of faith and the lips that confess his Lordship. It is not a matter of place and distance; it is a matter of sin or love, death or life. He is among those who, having been baptized into his death and buried with him in baptism, now too may live a new life. He is not among the dead; he is among the living, who have themselves died to sin and live for God, and therefore are where he is.

We do not, then, celebrate an alien, incomprehensible, distant mystery; we celebrate what life, what our lives, can all be about, are all about--the longed-for light in darkness, freedom in slavery, peace in distress, joy in bitterness. He is not among the latter; he has been raised from the dead; and--greatest miracle of all--we may join him in that great "there" beyond merit or expectation or even hope. Ourselves alive, we shall find him among the living.

Holy Thursday--March 27, 1975--C.N.R.

With this celebration we enter upon the holiest days of the Church's year, days in which we concentrate upon that center around which our whole Christian life must revolve, the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is true of the drama of the three days taken together; it is also true of each of the three celebrations: in each we are brought into the one great and central mystery.

We may begin our reflections this evening by considering the obedience to which we are called by the Lord. Twice we hear his command: "Do this...in remembrance of me." "As I have done, so you must do." We are to remember him by breaking the bread and by serving one another in imitation of his washing the disciples' feet. This is, to use Paul's phrase the great "obedience of faith."

It is, first of all, faith itself as obedience. We may not, with Peter's proud humility, refuse the ministrations of our Servant-Lord. There is only one source from which we may draw

salvation--the slave-service of the Lord--which was symbolized by the footwashing, was realized in the broken Body and outpoured Blood of the Cross, and is again symbolized and realized in this and every Eucharist. If we do not let him serve us, we have no part in his heritage.

And we must then let this obedient faith define our world and our selves. The meaning of the Lord's words and deeds is not properly grasped if we see it as part of a sacral universe and understand it as the origins of a new rite or the empowerment of a new sacred caste. Peter's protest symbolizes the challenge of faith, the decisive scandal of finding truth in injustice, holiness in unholiness, the sacred in the ultimate profanity which is death. The sacral vision of the world is overturned, as we see death and life and grace concentrate upon the cross, as we see the Holy One of God complete his incarnation in that most ordinary and natural but most devastating of human events, death itself. You cannot enter more deeply into the basic stuff of human existence than by dying, and Christ's having made even death holy is the ultimate tribute to his saving, rescuing power.

And this world-defining faith, concentrated in this and in every Eucharist, must then become the spring of that new obedience of our new selves by which we struggle to unpack our faith into the deeds and words of our everyday life. Whenever we gather here, he is in our midst. Each time, he speaks to us in his word and in his remembered victory. Each time, he gives to his disciples the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. Each time, he gives us his new commands: "Do this in memory of me." "What I have done, you must do." And in us, found and rejoiced and strengthened by his presence in our midst again and still as One who serves, he can become present still and again in the world, if we are obedient disciples of such a Lord, not discarding the world as a profanity, but embodying once again the scandal of a love of God which cannot be separated from the love of neighbor.

Such is the obedience and the faith in which we must be gathered here today, in the next days, and also in every assembling in Christ's name. Old truths and familiar, yes; a new commandment become very old to us. But perhaps some day, perhaps this day, they can be heard again as new, because newly desired, newly welcomed, newly obeyed. "The Lord is waiting to show us his favor, and he yearns to have pity on us" (Is 30:18). We have only to let him.

Easter Vigil--March 30, 1975--CNR

In the beginning, there was only the dark and silent abyss. Then a word was spoken, and out of the word sprang the light of life, and the primeval chaos surrendered to meaning and to order. But chaos had its revenge, and it was not long before the words of men became the Babel of peoples at war with their God and with each other. And when the Word was spoken again and echoed in the words of the man Jesus, chaos did not so easily give way. Its darkness fell upon the earth again, and its silence too, more awful now for being the stillness after speech, darkness after light. That dark silence prevailed for three days, and then was heard again the Word, "Let there be light," and there was light and speech: "He is not here; he has been raised." The eighth day of creation: and God looked upon what he had made, and behold, it was very good.

We gather in that light, creatures of that new word. We have gathered this evening in darkness, and seen the light spring up in silence, and rejoiced in the new word spoken to us and put upon our own lips. The darkness and light are symbols, surely;-but if we are at all serious, we know that we cannot say that they are "only symbols." We have had--each of us--our own experience of darkness, at least as threatening possibility, even as chaotic fact; and we would not have gathered here and recognized the joy on one another's face had we not also--each of us--had

experience of light, uncovering a new world to us, a new community, and a new self, too.

Not, of course, as if the story had come to an end, as if chaos were utterly banished. We have, all of us, yet to face that final dissolution of what God made good; and we do not pretend that death will not cast its shadow forward in the form of pain or grief or remorse. But if we can enter into Paul's words, then we have already experienced that last enemy, for we have been baptized into Christ's death and were buried with him--the ground has already closed over us--chaos has done its last and worst, and it has not prevailed, and we may walk in newness of life. "Who shall accuse us? It is God who has acquitted us. Who shall condemn us? It is Christ--Christ who died, and more than that, was raised from the dead--who is at God's right hand and pleads our cause. And what can separate us from the love of Christ?...There is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths--nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:33-39).

My sisters and brothers, that is the light in which we may walk--the "last enemy" is already undone. Let us let that light dawn upon ourselves; let us reflect it to one another; let us let it draw others to Christ; let us follow after it, to the Source from which it springs, the Father of lights, to whom, with the Son and Holy Spirit, be endless glory and praise. Amen.

Holy Thursday Liturgy--April 14, 1976--Seminary

In this house we celebrate this Liturgy from two standpoints. We gather, of course, as the Church, as the community of believers; but we also are an assembly of those who are devoted to the ordained ministry of the Church. In a seminary, I suppose, it is natural to consider the Holy Thursday Liturgy especially under this second aspect; and from one theological understanding of the ministry and its origins, speak of the Last Supper as the "institution" of the "priesthood." For that purpose, attention tends to focus on the first of the two dramatic moments recalled in our readings, Christ's giving of his Body and Blood with the enabling command to "do this in remembrance of me." But I want to start from the other scene, for the insight it can give us into the twofold nature of our gathering and the relation which must exist between our being the Church and our being an assembly of ministers.

When I was in theology, I remember seeing an ordination-invitation with a rather modern, somewhat abstract, ink-sketched representation of two figures. One was seated, the other kneeling at his feet, and it was natural to take it for an illustration of an ordination, Christ or a bishop sitting, about to lay hands on an Apostle or an ordinand kneeling in front of him. But above the two figures were written the words, *Exemplum dedi vobis*, "I have given you an example"--and a moment's thought made it clear that the figures were indeed those of Christ and a disciple, only it was not the one seated who represented Christ, but the one who was bent over, washing the other's feet. Some people who saw it were puzzled and even annoyed at the choice of this scene for an ordination, but I think it said something extremely important about both Church and ministry.

The point of this evening's service, of course, is that we must put ourselves into that scene. And we must first put ourselves into that scene as the figure who is seated, at whose feet the Lord Jesus is stooped in service. There is perhaps something of Peter in us all, which will protest at the thought, no doubt out of the loftiest of religious motives. But to us, Jesus will say

what he said to Peter, "If I do not wash your feet, you will have no share in my heritage." And then, like Peter, we must immediately let go our presuppositions, silence our protests, and accept the humble service of the Lord. This dialogue reveals that the foot-washing is much more than an ethical example; it is a dramatic representation of what Jesus was about in his whole ministry, but especially in his death and resurrection. Peter's protest and ours, then, is the protest of proud man--it is not genuine humility; it is sinful mankind's last protest against this shocking Good News; it is the protest of the Greeks' wisdom and of the Jews' power--"You shall never wash my feet!" Peter, perhaps, was half-way there--perhaps we are too--but Jesus demanded that he come all the way, to see wisdom in folly and power in weakness, the Lord and Teacher of all in the naked servant at his feet. The foot-washing symbolizes the washing away of our guilt, our cleansing unto holiness, the bath of regeneration in which we are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. And no one is a Christian except by permitting the Lord to be Lord in his own terms, by accepting his service; so that if we are to enter that scene, we must be the one sitting or reclining while the greater one performs his lowly service.

It should not be necessary to insist upon the importance of the idea: we have no share in Christ's heritage without submitting to redemption by his cross. And this, of course, is what we are celebrating in these days--not merely an ethical example, nor the death of the first and greatest of martyrs, nor an unfortunate fate quickly repaired by God. We are discovering and celebrating the truth of things and their deepest meaning, the truth about ourselves and our deepest roots. We are witnesses at the reconstitution and redefinition of reality, as words like "first," and "greatest," and "power," and "wisdom," and "life," and "death," melt away as in a crucible and emerge wholly different, purified of their dross, fitted for God's use. That is also what is supposed to be happening to us, too, during this week. We are ourselves supposed to undergo that purification, be shocked out of our pious expectations, and suffer the humiliation of being served by the Lord of all things.

And is that not also the first and primary truth of the other Last Supper scene we witness tonight? The Lord hands us bread, only it is his Body "which is for us;" he gives us wine to drink, only it is "the new covenant in his Blood." In a first sense, it is not something else, called the Eucharist he gives us, much less the "power" to "confect" it; it is himself and his service, the broken Body and the outpoured Blood. And his first command to us is "Take and eat; take and drink." And we have no right to think about places in his Kingdom if we are not ready to answer his question, "Can you drink the cup which I must drink?" The Lord offers us his Passover, his *transitus*, from this world to the Father: he is offering us the mystery of these days, and there is no other passage to his Father than the road he walked. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" The passion, death and resurrection of Christ are our only food and drink, and unless we eat and drink them in faith and love, we have no life in us.

Only when we have obeyed these first commands, only when we have eaten and drunk what the Lord offers us, only when we have let him wash us in his blood, only then can we properly obey those other commands: "Do this in remembrance of me; what I have done, you also must do." The relation between these two moments of obedience is immediate and intrinsic; or at least it is if we do not immediately fall back into that world of language and action which has been transmuted by the Cross. And this, we must admit, is a great temptation. No Christian, I presume, has the nerve to say that he has come in order to be served rather than to serve, or that he is among us as the Lord. But words come cheaply to our lips, tyrants have spoken of

themselves as "servants," and rhetoric can camouflage reality. The only secure rescue from such travesty is to keep in mind both sets of commands we receive from the Lord: "Do this in remembrance of me." Do what? Do what I have done; give your body and your blood; freely you have received, freely give." "What I have done, you also must do?" Do what? Wash one another's feet; lay down your lives for one another; love one another as I have loved you.

For no one is it more important to keep in mind this connection between the moments of our obedience than for ministers of the Lord and of his Church. We are the ones who must proclaim his words and "do in remembrance of him" the things that will call him to mind and bring his people into his presence that he may wash their feet and give them his Body and Blood to eat and drink. And it is a false start for a spirituality, a theology, a psychology of such ministry to start off with the word "power." There is no power in the Church today but the Lord's, and that is a strength perfected in what we consider weakness; there is no wisdom in the Church but the folly of the Cross. And we betray the one who ought rightly to be our Lord and Teacher--in fact we claim another Teacher and Lord--if the truth about our lives and their power is not the folly of the Cross and the weakness and humility of a servant at the Church's feet. Whenever, then, we are to preach, whenever we are to preside-over the Eucharist, whenever we are to serve, we must remember that to us also is the Word of the Cross addressed, that we too must eat and drink from the bitter cup of the Lord's passion, that we first must in all astonishment and disorientation find the Lord bending at our feet.

Let us, then, during these days put ourselves into that scene. In both moments we shall then be faithful in our ministry to the one who is among us as he who serves. In one moment, we shall find ourselves being served by the Lord and Teacher of all--and what room for pride is there here? And in the second moment, we shall find ourselves now bent low, before God's people, bringing them the enormous riches of our redemption as Christ did, in weakness and in folly.

Good Friday--April 16, 1976--CNR

In these holy days we are attending upon the central mysteries of Christianity, which means, of course, that we attend upon the mysteries of our own lives. There is a double movement here, then, of our God towards us and of ourselves towards our God. And this day's mystery is that the Cross of Jesus Christ is the centering symbol in which is concentrated what is in the end the one great and mysterious reality of the love of God for man.

The Cross stands first as the symbol of man's impotence and frustration. It is a symbol of our pain and death, of the human lot in a world of suffering. But it also is a sign of our sinfulness, of our concessions to irrationality and surrender to the absurd. At the hour of Christ's death, the dark cloud of our pain and sin fall heaviest upon the earth.

But it is at that very moment that the Cross is also a symbol of God's love. "The Word became flesh" is the great pronouncement with which St. John's Gospel opens, and the crucifixion is the final depths of God's enfleshment. To this point has the Word spoken in the flesh that he has used this deepest of human groans to speak his word of revelation, of truth and of grace. What was by our efforts a symbol of our futility and infidelity becomes by Christ's obedience the symbol of God's faithful love and enduring power. And so the Cross becomes the symbol of joy because man's dark sin is not stronger than God's bright forgiving love/

That is what we celebrate today in these simple but profound rites. Let us continue them now, repentant of our sins and failures but rejoicing in God's forgiving acceptance of our poor,

weak and uncomprehending selves. And out of whatever depths of pain or ignorance or anger or pride or fear let us speak in quiet joy our thanksgiving to God that he has not left us alone in our lot, but, sharing it, has transformed it for his glory and our life.

Easter Vigil--April 18, 1976--CNR

I fear that it approaches the banal to say that this night is the dawning of our hope. Besides the obviousness of the remark, there is above all the fact that such words come so easily and they are not always accompanied by the reality. But words are, perhaps, all we have, and of this night we may say what Augustine said about speaking of God, "Woe to those who speak not, when those who speak say nothing."

But there is, of course, more than words. There has been the darkness with which we began. We have seen light burst forth, driving darkness away. And we have had pictured before us a band of slaves escaping prison, a forsaken wife restored to a covenant of peace with her husband, a storm-battered and unconsolated city restored and made as beautiful as precious jewels, a penniless band of the hungry and thirsty invited to a rich feast, gentle rain falling upon a parched and barren land, clean water purifying the unclean, a new heart and spirit, made of flesh, able to feel and to love and to obey, instead of an old and stony, walled-up self--all of these scenes opening out upon the women who came to perform the last services of an old religion, but became the first witnesses of the new thing which God was doing. And to such good news we have tried in our own way to respond with our songs of welcome and thanksgiving and praise.

We have ourselves, in one sense, so little to do--only to let the power of these symbols and images, songs and praises, work upon and within us, to let there be something in our hearts like what took place at the tomb. That is why Ezekiel's prophecy is so central, for what we most need are those new hearts and spirits, and for us to have them is no less a wonder than the transformation of the flesh of Jesus into the New Man of God's making. We owe great thanks to God if that is what has been happening during this Lent and during these holy days, and if that has not happened yet, it is not too late, God can still raise from the dead, the promise still is held out to us, and He who promises may be trusted.

Such is the power held out to us today, and it is the great and chief message of this night--that our futility and rebellion have limits, that they have done their worst and have not succeeded, that out of the ashes of our works God raises up a transfigured life, forgiving, accepting, welcoming, delighting in us, the brothers and sisters in whose lot he has fully shared and whom he does not leave behind as he returns to the Father. Paul called him "the eldest in a large family of children," and we are the other members of that family, we and all believers, those now alive and those also who see him face-to-face, one grand family of the living who have a common Spirit who teaches them to call God their *Abba*.

Such is the power of this night and its promise. God grant that it may be fulfilled among and in us all, and upon all for whom this night Christ has dawned in splendor.

Holy Thursday--April 7, 1977--CNR

When I was in the seminary, I remember that one day a classmate received an invitation to an ordination. On its cover there was a line drawing in a rather modern, abstract style. Two

figures were represented, one seated, the other bowed low at his feet. Given the occasion, it was natural to think that the one seated represented Christ or a bishop, the other an apostle or an ordinand. But above the figures were written the words, *Exemplum dedi vobis*, and a moment's thought made it clear that the figures represented the exact opposite: the seated figure was the apostle, and the figure bowed low in service was the Lord Jesus. It gave a start to realize this meaning, and some there wondered whether it was an appropriate image for an ordination-card. Their question and the general surprise communicate something of the challenge which we all ought to experience at hearing the Gospel which has just been read.

Only John's Gospel records this scene; but there is a Last Supper saying of Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke which exactly expresses its meaning. "Which is the greater," Jesus asks, "one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves." The Lord and Teacher of all is among us as our servant, stooped low to wash our feet. We may protest as Peter did, "Lord, you will never wash my feet!" but we will always hear those terrible words of Jesus in reply, "Unless I wash you, you will have no share in my heritage." The Lord will not come among us except as the one who serves.

The very harshness of Jesus' reply to Peter indicates the significance of Christ's act of service. It is one of the great "signs" that mark the Fourth Gospel, inviting us beyond what our eyes can see to what only faith can discern. When Christ stoops to the service of his disciples and washes their feet, he performs the "sign" of the one great act of service of us all: the taking up of a slave's role and the washing of mankind in his own blood. No one can be his disciple, claim a share in his heritage, unless he accepts that revolutionary service, recognizes the Lord and Teacher of all in the crucified One, and accepts the forgiveness of his sins in Christ's blood.

That concentrated "sign" of Christ's sacrificial service is also given to us in the other Last Supper scene that is recalled for us this evening--when Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to his disciples as his Body given over and as his Blood poured out in forgiveness. It is not bread and wine which we receive from his hands; it is his own self, surrendered for us, taking away our sins, and bringing us true and lasting life before God. And every time we eat that bread and drink that wine, we proclaim that death and share in his resurrection and await his return. As the foot-washing, so the Eucharist is a sign, concentrating in simple human gesture the service by which Jesus became Lord and Messiah and we became his people.

But in each of these Last Supper scenes, the description of the gesture of Jesus is followed by the command which he lays upon us. "If I, who am your Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you must wash one another's feet." "Do this in remembrance of me." Those are not commands addressed only to the apostles and to those who succeed to their ministry; nor are they commands only to repeat with literal exactness what he himself did at the Last Supper. They are commands that those who have received the service of the Lord become the servants of others. If at this and every Eucharist, we are present as those who sit at table and Christ is present among us as the one who serves, then when we rise from receiving this service, it must be so that we may take Christ's place at the feet of one another, being among and for them what Christ is among and for us, as ones who serve.

That inescapable link between Christ's service as our salvation and our service as our obedience to Christ may perhaps provide a theme for our celebration of the holy days we now enter. We are not to approach them as observers at a sacred tableau. We are to enter the tableau ourselves, receiving in repentance and joyful faith the humble service of our Lord. And such must be our repentance and faith, that the celebrations cease to be a tableau at all, however

beautifully and strikingly celebrated. What in these days is concentrated in word and gesture, in song and light, has to be unlocked and has to spread itself out now not in ritual gesture and word, light and song, but in humble and self-forgetting deeds and words in our everyday worlds, among those with whom we find it so difficult to be present as one who serves. If we can reach such repentance and faith and love, then the service of Christ will truly once again be realized among us, as, washed clean, we enter into that service which is the glorious heritage he offers us.

Good Friday--April 8, 1977--CNR

The Scriptural readings today have their own power, and there is no point to many words from any preacher. Let us simply enter into the movement of God's mercy which they express, from the days of Israel down to our own day as we gather in faith and thanksgiving to God who has so loved us.

Israel's faith let us hear and join in the mysterious figure of the Suffering Servant, in whom first is foreshadowed a Messiah and Lord who does not come in what we would call triumph, but in weakness and pain, not only sharing our lot, but bearing away its infirmities and guilt and taking away our sins. A figure no longer so mysterious to us for whom Jesus Christ has by his sufferings won pardon and justification.

In the Passion of the Lord, let us hear, not of the resisted execution of an unfortunate, but of that revolutionary trial in which the condemned is the Judge and the crucified the King, in which a cross becomes a throne, in which death gives rise to life, as from the side of Christ flow the sacraments of water and blood in which we the Church are given birth and sustained.

And this day and every day, let us acknowledge that "we do not have a high priest unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned;" who lives eternally to intercede for us, to be the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, in whom we may confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need.

Let us praise all these blessings as we venerate the cross on which they were won for us; and before this throne of grace let us beg God's mercy and favor on Christ's Church and its ministers, on those who prepare to enter the Church, on those Christians who are not part of our communion, on the first people of the covenant, on those who have not yet found God in Christ, on those who serve in public office, on the sick and the dying, the imprisoned, the hungry, those who are not in the truth. Our sisters and brothers are they all: let us bring them with us when we make our plea for the Lord's good mercy on us, that the cross of Christ again in and among us be the source of life, of hope, of truth, of health, of love, of communion.

Easter Vigil--April 10, 1977--Seminary

This liturgy concentrates in itself almost all of the great symbols of Christian faith and worship. Out of the primeval darkness God called forth the light of creation; and into the light of our darkness, he has called forth the light of the rising Christ. Israel passed safely through the waters of the Red Sea; and our Christ has passed safely through the destruction of death. What the prophet offered as free food and drink, we will receive as Christ's great gift in his Body and Blood. And the purifying waters of the other prophet will come upon us also to recall the gift of

the Spirit God has poured out upon us. Such are the great gifts for which we thank God on this sacred night.

They are the gifts which all mankind receives in Jesus Christ. For we do not celebrate merely the fate of a holy individual of long ago. When Jesus of Nazareth suffered, it was our infirmities and guilt he carried and our sins he took away. When Jesus of Nazareth died, it was our death he died and in him, St. Paul says, all of us died. And when Jesus of Nazareth was made Lord and Christ, it was all of us, too, who were raised from death and given his life. *Our* death was destroyed when he died, and *our* life restored in his resurrection.

That is why we are not here as observers of a rite that does not concern us; we are celebrating the truth about our own lives--our story is being told. That is what Paul especially teaches when he draws the direct and exact parallel between Christ's death and resurrection and our baptism: we were buried with him so that we might live a new life with him, and we must regard ourselves as dead to sin and alive for God in Christ Jesus. What happened when light was drawn from darkness, when slaves were set free from Israel, when Jesus broke the bonds of death, is what has happened and can happen for us.

Bow difficult we find it to believe that! How sure we are about the inevitability of darkness and death! Take that word of Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts." But do we not usually reserve that word for dealing with tragedies we do not understand, the sufferings of the innocent or an early death? But for Isaiah it was a word, not for resignation, but for hope. It is spoken in the context of a promised forgiveness, and is followed immediately by the description of God's powerful Word which does not return to God without accomplishing the end for which it was sent. This word, and every other word we have heard this evening, is not a call to accept the inevitable; it is exactly the opposite: the announcement of the end of inevitabilities.

For what is more inevitable than death? And yet even death is undone this night: death has no more power over Christ and no more power over us. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. And, if death is overcome, so is every shadow of death, whether in suffering and pain, or in weakness and sin. How can we search for the Living One among the dead? He is not here. He is risen.

That is the truth we must permit to dawn on us this evening--that we too need not remain among the dead, that we need not remain as we are, that we too can be raised. However long its reign may have been, whatever there is of darkness and slavery in us can be overcome. Light can dawn and we can know ourselves to be free. As thirsty as we may be, there is a living water to quench our thirst. As stony and immovable as our hearts may be, they can be softened into hearts that can feel again and respond again and love again. We can be where Christ is, not among the dead, but alive and among the living.

And what is true of each of us is true also of our families and communities, where the reign of sin and death is seen most clearly and felt most acutely. The hearts of fathers can be turned to their sons and those of sons to their fathers. Misunderstanding and rivalry and alienation are not inevitable, nor are jealousy and anger, fear and frustration, iron necessities. If the dissolution of death can be undone, then even we can be forgiven and, more, even we can forgive. Light can dawn on our lives together, too, and the Body of Christ can live by his life. Families and communities, too, can rise from the dead.

When St. Paul spoke of Christ as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, he

referred to the example of the farmer bringing to Temple the first bushel of wheat he had harvested. That is the promise held out by the joyful message of this evening: that the resurrection of Christ was not the end of God's life-giving work, but, in a sense its beginnings. And there is a harvest of the Spirit which must follow it, in our resurrection into love, joy, and peace, into a fellowship in the Spirit, a foretaste of the life into which Christ has already entered, and has entered in order to bring us there to be with him and with the God of the living.

Easter Sunday--April 10, 1977--CNR

The readings for Easter liturgies have an interesting structure. There is always, of course, an account of the discovery of the empty tomb or of a resurrection-appearance of the Lord. Then again there is either (as in the Easter Vigil) a prophet's vision anticipating the glories displayed or given in the resurrection, or else an account from the Acts of the Apostles of the earliest preaching of the resurrection. Finally, there is a text from the NT in which it is made clear how Christians share in the life of the Risen Christ.

Something crucial to an understanding of our Christianity is here displayed. The reference to the empty tomb and the resurrection-appearances grounds our faith in history. We do not gather around a vague, general belief that things work out in the end; we gather as the Church out of a belief that in one particular historical moment something different happened, that once at least in the succession of human moments, the inevitable drift towards death and dissolution was reversed and those ancient fates were robbed of their victory.

But what prevents such an assertion from being merely an appeal to the spectacular is its significance for the lives of Christians and of all other men. The resurrection of Christ is now seen as the key moment in that process of Incarnation which is Christianity's distinctive principle. The movement of God towards us, his immersion into our condition, reached its fulness when Jesus of Nazareth died. And the necessary corollary of that movement--the assumption of our condition into God--is climaxed when he is made both Lord and Christ. That is why Paul could say to his people: "*You* have died" in Christ's death, and why he now could say, "*You* have been raised up with Christ" and "*your* life is hidden with Christ in God." The whole of our living is now in Christ, even our life's dying; only now there is a larger whole to our living, for death does not end our living, and our vision is not rooted to the earth but may look up to where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Two mysteries we celebrate, then: Christ's resurrection and ours. An utter break in history's otherwise relentless sequence of birth and death, and a ground and goal of our breathing and thinking and loving removed from our fragile grasp and control. "The right hand of the Lord has struck with power," sings the Psalm, "the right hand of the Lord is exalted." And because Christ is so exalted, each of us can continue with the song, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." We are treasured by our God in the love he has borne his son, and nothing can take us from his grasp, for this is a love which this day is proven stronger even than death.