

Holy Thursday 2012

The last few days have seen us considering some unattractive aspects of human nature: lying, deceit, evasion, denial. Today, thanks be to God, we have a party. The ability to have fun, to play, to party, to celebrate—shared with other mammals—is one of our attractive characteristics. And, what is more, it's a party where the host honours the guests. Just as it should be. Washing feet nowadays might seem a less than appealing activity. Who knows what you might find under the socks and stout brogues? Bunions, nodules, sores, ulcers, fungi (Of course, the trouble is that we wear socks and shoes. Footwear is bad for you). But think back to sandal wearing, dusty, car-less and bike-less times. Washing feet is a real act of welcome and charity. An act of service. You might like to consider how our churches welcome visitors and deal with strangers. It may be inappropriate to tell them to shed shoes and socks for a relaxing foot bath, but there are other ways that we can enhance our hospitality.

Renewal for the feet, renewal for the soul

Do this in remembrance of me. These words take us back to Jerusalem two thousand years ago. But they work the other way, too: they bring Jerusalem of two thousand years ago here today, to this place. And not just the words, but all the action and the whole occasion: the meal, the togetherness of the disciples, even those who had something to hide. Do this in remembrance of me brings it all into the present. And all the intervening years as well: all the Christians of the past, all the joys and sadnesses of history. The whole of the past concentrated into the words and action of the consecration prayer: we open the door of Dr Who's Tardis and find ourselves in the vastness of history. This notion of space-time is a bit at odds with western European linear time, but it is inherent in folk-memory, in community-memory, and is very much a living part of middle-Eastern culture, even today. It is Hebrew zikkaron. It has something in common with modern concepts of space-time. Every time the Lord's supper is celebrated, the past is gathered up and presented to us. And then in the banquet, past and present are launched into the world transformed. Rebirth. The universe compressed into the infinitely dense black hole of the crucifixion, then dispersed with infinite acceleration into the new universe. This is a magnificent vision. All Christian theology and history concentrated into the moment at every Eucharist. No wonder we should celebrate it with all possible splendour and theatre and solemnity and joy.

Each of us has all our past within us. We are the sum of our memories. All our past is included in our genes – genes from the primeval soup at the moment of creation are in every one of our cells. All this past is received and affirmed tonight. We are cleansed. We are fed. We are, and heaven knows I need this, forgiven. We have the meal set out by the gracious father for the prodigal son. We are accepted, and we are launched for future service.

Everyone is invited. No matter what you think of yourself, come and receive grace. You are welcome.

Listen to the words of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, written in 1620.

In the old Ritual of the Church we find that on the cover of the canister, wherein was the Sacrament of His Body, there was a star engraven, to shew us that now the star leads us thither, to His body there. And what shall I say now, but according as St. John saith, and the star, and the wise men say, 'Come.' And He, Whose the star is, and to Whom the wise men came, saith, 'Come.' And let them who are disposed, 'Come.' And let whosoever will, take of the 'Bread of Life, which came down from Heaven' this day into Bethlehem, the house of bread. Of which Bread the Church is this day the house, the true Bethlehem, and all the Bethlehem we have now left to

come to for the Bread of life, – of that His life which we hope for in Heaven. And this our nearest coming that here we can come, till we shall by another venite come, unto Him in His Heavenly Kingdom to which He grant we may come, That this day came to us in earth that we thereby might come to Him and remain with Him for ever, 'Jesus Christ the Righteous.'