

**Homily for Maundy Thursday 2019**  
*A Servant at His Last Supper*

The late Anthony Bourdain wrote,  
“Chefs have been playing the ‘My Last Supper’ game,  
in one version or another, since humans first gathered  
round the flames to cook.”

The game for the chefs goes something like this:

“If you were to die tomorrow,  
what single dish, what one mouthful of food  
from anywhere in the world  
or anytime in your life,  
would you choose as your last?  
What would be your choice for your last meal on earth?”

Bourdain wisely observes,  
“If cooking professionally is about control—  
about manipulating the people, the ingredients,  
and the strange, physical forces of the kitchen universe  
to do one’s bidding;  
always anticipating, always preparing,  
always dominating one’s environment—  
then eating is about submission.  
About letting go.”

Bourdain wrote this as part of his introduction to the coffee table book,  
*My Last Supper—50 Great Chefs and Their Final Meals*

It’s a book of portraits, interviews and recipes.

It’s fun and thought provoking.

There are as many similarities as there are differences between the chefs.

It’s not surprising that each of the featured chef  
seemed to relish the chance

to share their requirements for their “last supper”  
that reflected who they are and not just as professionals.

They want us to know all the elements  
that go into making a great last meal by answering five questions:  
What would be your last meal on earth?  
What would be the setting for the meal?  
What would you drink with your meal?  
Would there be music?  
Who would be your dining companions?  
Who would prepare the meal?  
There answers give us a glimpse of what and who they value.

So, in a sense, tonight we get to play the “last meal game” with Jesus;  
we know how he answered these questions—  
not just for himself, but for all of us.

Jesus chooses for his last supper on earth the Passover meal,  
the meal that commemorates God’s great deliverance  
of the people of Israel from slavery into freedom.  
At this meal, all the events of that great deliverance  
are remembered and those who eat the meal  
renews their covenant with the God of their salvation.

Yet, this is more than a Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples.

Listen again to what has been handed down to us:

*On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, gave  
thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying,  
“This is my body which is given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.”*

*Again after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks  
and gave it for all to drink saying,  
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.”*

These are the words that set this *seder*, this Passover  
apart from any other.

Jesus took the unleavened bread and, blessing it,  
pronounced that it was his body.  
He took the cup of wine, and blessing it,  
pronounced that it was his blood.

Then he told his disciples, who would soon become his apostles,  
to break the bread and share the cup in remembrance of him.  
Yet it was and is more than just a remembrance of him  
because from the story of the road to Emmaus  
we believe that Christ is present with us  
in the breaking of the bread  
and among those gathered—even if only two—in his name.  
When we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
we not only remember our Lord's Passover  
but our souls are fed,  
the new creation in us is nourished and strengthened  
so we can become what we eat—the body of Christ.  
We know by the choice of this meal who and what Jesus values.  
We also have insight into who is with and for us.

But we know that, in addition to the words he added,  
something else happened at that last meal  
that was not part of previous Passover celebrations—  
From the gospel of John alone we hear  
that Jesus' washed the feet of his disciples.

Now if you knew you were going to die in under a week,  
along with considering what your last supper would be,  
wouldn't you prioritize and take care of the really important things?  
Apparently, for Jesus,  
this includes not only celebrating the Passover with them,  
but also washing his disciples' feet.  
Why did he think that was so important?  
As Jesus explains in John's gospel,  
it is to set an example for us of service to others.

In the account of this meal in Luke's gospel—  
which we just heard on the Sunday of the Passion—  
Jesus tells his disciples in the midst of their dispute  
about which of them is the greatest—

“The greatest among you must become like the youngest,  
and the leader like one who serves.

For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?

Is it not the one at the table?

But I [your teacher, your Master, your Lord],

I am among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:26-27)

*I have set you an example.*

*I am among you as one who serves.*

A natural and understandable hesitancy  
accompanies any serious discussion of service . . .

We experience a fear that comes out something like this:

“If I do that, people will take advantage of me,  
they will walk all over me.”

And right there we must see the difference  
between choosing to serve  
and choosing to be a servant.

When we choose to serve, we are still in charge.

We decide whom we will serve and when we will serve.

And if we are in charge,

we will worry a great deal about anyone stepping on us,  
that is, taking charge over us.

But when we choose to be a servant,

we give up the right to be in charge.

There is great freedom in this.

If we voluntarily choose to be taken advantage of,  
then we cannot be manipulated.

When we choose to be a servant,  
we surrender the right to decide who and when we will serve.  
We become available and vulnerable.

“I have set you an example,” Jesus says.  
“If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,  
you also should wash one another’s feet.”  
We are not here to be in charge,  
to lord it over one another;  
we are here to wash one another’s feet . . .  
or hands . . .  
in preparation for service,  
in preparation to serve one another with humility and love.  
Like eating a meal, it’s about submission and letting go.

Visiting a seminary class,  
a leader of a local Methodist church  
was asked about his congregation in Nashville.  
He told the class about his church’s multipurpose room—  
a place where the Eucharist is shared on Sundays,  
tutoring local kids happens on weekday afternoons,  
and then becomes a dining hall for the homeless on Saturdays.  
Then, one of the students asked  
another type of “which is greatest” question,  
“Which is more important,  
the Eucharist or all those other things you do in that room?”  
The Methodist churchman answered,  
“Do you think that we would celebrate on Sunday the way we do  
if we didn’t teach and feed people?  
And would we help teenagers with English and math,  
or cook for the homeless the way we do,  
if we didn’t have Communion together on Sunday?”

In other words, if we want to be servants  
we need to learn from the One is among us as a servant.  
Because Jesus himself in his passion, in his meal,  
and in his foot washing  
is both the model and means of the grace  
we need in order to be servants  
and to love one another—  
as Christ has first loved us.

Certainly, our times need the strength of servant leadership.  
To live in the light of the cross  
and by the example of Jesus,  
is to seek relationships of mutual respect  
that refuse to use and abuse  
those less powerful and privileged than ourselves.

The fact that Jesus spends his last meal with his friends,  
pleading with them to serve others  
and love one another  
in spite of their own differences and disagreements,  
is compelling to say the very least.  
As Jesus bows and bends,  
he shows us the humility and love  
that led to his death  
but even more its inseparable connection  
to how we are to live together.

Look around—there are countless ways  
we can serve and love another  
in both great and small ways.  
We can feel intimidated by the need  
or our fear that we will be taken advantage of.

And yet, if we let Jesus teach us,  
trusting that he will be with us every step of the way,  
we will increase our capacity for servant-hood and the joy it brings.

At first, Peter didn't want his feet to be in Jesus' hands.  
But he does submit and let's go.  
At the end of John's gospel,  
Jesus says, that for Peter,  
it means that he will be taken  
where he does not wish to go.  
Perhaps, we fear this too.  
That if we let Jesus take hold of our feet,  
we will have to go to places we do not wish to go.

Nevertheless, the last words Jesus says to Peter  
in the gospel of John is "Follow me."  
What Jesus says to Peter, he says to each of us.  
"Follow me."  
"I have set you an example."

Come, let us follow him.