

Whom Shall We Invite to the Table?

- Holy Thursday
- April 2, 2015
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On this evening when we enter into the three sacred days of experiencing more intensely God's life-giving love in Jesus Christ, we approach a table. This is the Mass of the Lord's Supper. We have been invited to his table and we have accepted. We are here; we approach the table for the supper with the Lord.

We are here, but whom else shall we invite to the table? To whom, through our love and our lives, does Christ reach out to bring to the table of his love and his gift of life?

Let's invite our family and our friends to sit with us at the table, making sure to include a family member or friend with whom we may have a broken relationship or from whom may be estranged. See them at the table and look them in the eye. Reach out to them and bring them to the Lord's Supper.

Who else? We are in a chapel on a campus in a certain place. Let's invite to the table those around us: patients and families from the hospitals; young people from Juvenile Detention down the street; the hungry mother with children coming to Francis House for food and clothing; kids of Bailey-Gatzert and their Somali parents of Yesler Terrace. Bring them in and sit them down and see them and look them in the eye. Let's also invite to the table the homeless and the mentally ill persons trying to stay alive on the streets around us; the young men in the King County Jail for a drug-related offenses; some lost souls along Broadway. What a table we are accumulating!

Is there room for more? Yes. How about one of our college students who has never been in this chapel? Let's bring her in, invite her to unplug her iPod from her ears and be present with us. I need to bring to the table both an adjunct professor wanting a better wage and more voice and a member of the SEIU union; I hope they might come; I need them at the table, not to bargain, but to be with the Lord who invites them here as much as me

There is plenty of room around this table because it is the Lord's Supper, and it is as wide and loving as is his love for all. So how about bringing in both the victims of war and hatred and those who perpetrate them; those discriminated against and those who discriminate; children abused by priests, Jesuits and others and the abusers; the wealthy and the poor; the police and gang members; the healthy and the wounded; the loved and the rejected? Bring whom you want and especially whom you need to have to this table tonight, for it is the Lord's Supper.

Look around at who has come and who is here. Don't just notice they are here but look each and all in the eye. One reason I say this is because of something Pope Francis said which sticks with me and is so telling of what the Lord is about in the Gospel, whose supper we enjoy. Pope Francis says that when someone tells him they give alms, he asks them, "Do you look the person in the eye?" Very few say they do. Then he goes further and asks the almsgiver, "Do you touch

the person?” Almost no one does. Francis says we must not only look the poor in the eye as a person of worth, but touch the poor for the sake of their dignity and ours.

If we have looked in the eye all whom we have brought to our table tonight, how about that touching? As the very first thing of the supper Jesus touched each and all who had gathered at the table and whom he had looked in the eye with love, even touching one who had already betrayed him in his heart. He did it by washing the feet of each of them, touching and washing and soothing and salving what was the dirtiest, exposed part of each, to make them whole, to give them a full share in who he was and what he was doing for them in these days. Seeing was not enough for him; being seen was not enough for them; touching and being touched was needed. Only if we touch and are touched by Christ can we have a full share, a full inheritance with him. We must touch each of those we have brought to the table if we really want them there, really want to share our life and faith with them, rather than only look upon them. How do we touch, especially literally, but also and importantly figuratively, all whom we invite to the Lord’s Table? How do we do in our own way what Jesus did in his way by washing the feet of all at the table before proceeding to a meal of fellowship with them?

Pope Francis says something else which comes to me strongly this evening when we have expanded more and more the table of the Lord. In his apostolic exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel”, he doesn’t let me or you off the hook by our working on behalf of the poor, changing structures, giving to collections, serving on a committee to end homelessness, or marching for justice. He writes:

“I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us... in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friend, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. (#198) ...No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. ...I ask you to seek, as a community, creative ways of accepting this new call. (#201)”

On this solemn celebration of the Lord’s Supper and in the days which follow, we enter into the central mystery of our faith and of our salvation. We seek to draw closer to Christ at this table and in these holy days. We are asked in all realism to see and touch the poor, see and touch the suffering Christ they know, so that they may evangelize, that they may “gospel” us. As we proceed now to the washing of feet and the gathering around the Lord’s table, let us be committed to look in the eye and touch Christ in the poor who are his and our best friends.