

## WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS ?

So asks the youngest child at the Jewish Passover Meal. It's a great *opener* because it allows the Jewish family to introduce the retelling of the Passover story.....and how the Passover meal brings realities that happened in the past into the present moment.

**Our annual Christian Passover feast is approaching.** It begins this Thursday night in every Church with the **Mass of the Lord's Supper**, and so over three days the biblical drama of the Passover of Christ will unfold in the Liturgy and in our lives.

**These days embrace all:** that is my experience - not just as a priest but since as far as I can remember; since being the *boat bearer* for the Thurifer on Holy Thursday in Forebank about 1974.....I sensed even then that these days embrace all and I have yet to be proved wrong. The Rites of the church **express and shape** the life of the church, the life of baptised people. Lent, the Triduum, Eastertime, the 90 plus days of the paschal season are the clearest expression of all of this.

**If we keep Lent as a parish it seeps into every part of parish life.** The arrival of the Easter Triduum each year is then all absorbing. It's my experience that these three days can have a transforming effect in the lives on individuals, not only those who are baptised and received into full communion with the Church at the East Vigil but also of the whole parish community. The days are marked by rituals expressed in liturgies, but the days themselves, *lived by us*, are what is transforming. The liturgies are nourishment, and insight, reminders of where we come from and who we are, baptised people living out our Lent, Triduum, and Eastertime. Gradually, the liturgical seasons can mould us, mould our parish communities in their discipline and their tradition. The keeping of these days, over the years, is what makes us Christian; they are what makes the church. They are a way of life for this Catholic Community.

So, toward evening on Holy Thursday Lent ends, it just fades out, and the Church enters the Paschal or Easter Triduum. The church will gather a number of times to pray and celebrate in ritual over these days, the highpoint being the vigil of Saturday night, beginning in darkness and continuing with an awesome and lengthy recital of our foundation story, our scriptures. Then once the great communion of saints has been invoked, and the Spirit called to enter the waters of our font, when the elect and ourselves have firmly renounced evil, and faith is professed in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the fountain of baptism is opened. And we are in continuity with the church throughout the world and with its early traditions. The faith is professed not just in word but in waters.

So, in the Triduum, we celebrate this paschal movement of Christ to the Father, of ourselves to the font.....that's where we are heading. It is one celebration over three days....and how the biblical drama unfolds in the liturgy. The Gospel yesterday morning (Saturday) before this feast of Palm Sunday, left the hearer with a question, a question asked by those who stood around in the temple precincts at the time of the Passover. They were asking each other: **Will he come to the festival or not?** The answer is **"Of course he will"**. He can't not come to the festival; his whole life, indeed from the very mention of a messiah figure in the Old Testament texts, the whole process and drama of salvation history has been leading to his revelation as the Divine Son, the Passover Lamb, the crucified and glorified Saviour. St John uniquely reveals this on Friday when we hear his passion narrative. We can trust his word. We can trust the witness of this *beloved disciple*.

In John's chronicle of Holy Thursday, the beloved disciple lays his head on Jesus' breast. In doing so, this disciple feels the very heartbeat of God. He heard it. The beloved disciple with his head on the heart of Jesus and his eyes facing outward to the world is an image of the church, of all those called to be beloved disciples. To be rooted in the love of Christ is to be able to look out to the world and its needs with generosity, not with jealousy or bitterness. This is how John wants us to understand ourselves when we celebrate the Eucharist - in love with Jesus, but not cut off from the world; he serves and wants us to serve also. That's why we have the washing of feet at the Mass on Holy Thursday!

