

Maundy Thursday
April 13, 2006
Homily by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

We're here to eat; that's why I address you tonight from the table. This meal is something mystical yet real, divine yet simple, powerful beyond imagination yet bread and wine. We eat and drink this meal because of these things and because Jesus told us to do it. The words with which Jesus instituted this meal are in the Bible, four times over—so they were *very* important to the first of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they are very important to us. On that night long ago Christ was not so much betrayed as handed over for God's purpose. The Romans arrested Jesus and killed him, but in the cross God vividly reveals atonement and forgiveness. This meal makes the cross tangible to us. That same atonement and forgiveness are mixed up thickly in this meal. Christ is not sacrificed tonight. He died once and that's enough times for anyone to die. All the wonderful things that are Christ are in this meal, tonight and whenever it is offered.

So, Friends of Christ we give thanks to God the Father, our creator, who has made the whole cosmos, saved us from Sin and made us holy and precious, and we thank God in advance for the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

We remember Christ and what he means for us. When we met for my Grandma Leitzke's memorial service it was for *memory*. We shared our memories over lunch, in the chapel, at the headstone, hanging around the house, eating dinner, driving home; we talked, we relived, we remembered Grandma. Several

times over the course of the day I half expected to see her sitting with us; it was as if, in her memorial, she was alive. This meal is Christ's memorial and in this meal Christ is alive. Christ is alive and not only as a memory but as a living, resurrected person, the firstborn of the dead, and the locus of our faith. Christ is in, with, and under the bread and wine. They *are* his body and blood.

The Holy Spirit, the immeasurable strength of God's love, makes this meal possible and effective. The same spirit which is God and which lives in Christ sweeps into the bread and wine and into us. As we dine together we are forged together—that's what makes it Holy *Communion*. God unites our community. We eat this meal together so we can go out into the world together and serve God. We don't just remember Christ; Christ nourishes us so that we can serve God and our neighbors. The memories of Christ remind us of our mission; the mission is ongoing.

God is at work. We receive forgiveness every day. We see redemption every day. We see lives changed by God's amazing grace. The resurrection is being accomplished now in the world and in this meal, a foretaste of the feast to come. In this meal our future is collapsed into our present. We remember Christ, but Christ is here now. We get a taste of that day when all of us will gather to worship God in eternal joy.

Friends of Christ we are here to eat. This is not your ordinary meal. Just as Jesus was handed over to God's purpose Christ handed over this institution. He handed it over to his disciples, who handed it over to those who followed them. St

Paul handed it over to the congregations he founded, and through the centuries this meal has been handed over to us. We gather to eat the flesh and drink the blood that make God's presence most fully known. We sing and pray and watch and listen and taste and smell; we engage all of our senses in this amazing supper. We eat of it every Sunday, every Saturday, every Wednesday, whenever it is offered, and we partake of it on this night, when we remember our Lord Jesus the Christ in the night when he was handed over.

Friends of Christ, in this Lenten season we have heard our Lord's call to intensify our struggle against Sin, death, and the devil—all that keeps us from loving God and each other. This is the struggle to which we were committed at Baptism; God's forgiveness and the power of his Spirit to amend our lives continue with us because of his love for us in Jesus, our Savior.

Within the community of his Church, God never wearies of giving peace and new life. In the words of absolution we receive forgiveness as from God himself. This absolution we should not doubt, but firmly believe that thereby our sins are forgiven before God in heaven, for it comes to us in the name and by the command of our Lord.

We who receive God's love in Jesus Christ are called to love one another, to be servants to each other as Jesus became our servant. Our commitment to this loving service is signified in the washing of feet, following the example the Lord gave us on the night before his death.

It is, however, in the Holy Communion that the members of Christ's body participate most intimately in his love. Remembering our Lord's last supper with his disciples, we eat the bread and share the cup of this meal. Together we receive the Lord's gift of himself and participate in that new covenant which makes us one in him. The Eucharist is the promise of the great banquet we will share with all the faithful when our Lord returns, the culmination of our reconciliation with God and each other. Amen