

# THE EMMAUS SERIES

## Holy Thursday

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14

1 Corinthians 11: 22-26

John 13: 1-5

### ***I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done***

This evening we begin the Easter Triduum, in which we celebrate the central mystery of our faith – whereby, having shared our life and even our death, our Saviour passed from this world to the Father, becoming the source of eternal life in the New creation which is the final achievement of God.

On this day, Jesus celebrated the Paschal Meal of old Israel for the last time, and fulfilled what it foreshadowed, in the gift of the Eucharist. (Let us not lose sight of the traditions we have inherited from old Israel; if we appreciate the great hopes which found expression in these traditions we shall come to a deeper understanding of God's final blessings.) At first sight we may be surprised that the gospel reading does not refer directly to the Eucharist. But when we understand the significance of the gesture of Jesus it describes we recognise that it sheds light on the whole mystery of salvation we are about to celebrate. John's presentation of the Eucharist, we know, was given earlier in his telling of the story of Jesus. The solemn introduction to the account of the foot washing alerts us to the far-reaching significance of what Jesus was about to do: "Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father ... now he showed how perfect his love was". Jesus had already declared, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). Now he performed an action that even a Jewish slave could not be asked to do. Blustering Peter gave expression to the amazement which must have overwhelmed the rest of the group. The gesture of Jesus was more than a lesson in humility; it gave expression to what is at the heart of the Gospel, the astounding ways of God. It gave expression to the ultimate truth of all personhood and the relationships with others that are essential to authentic personhood. This divine truth does not deny personal differentiation; he who washed the disciples' feet unhesitatingly declared himself their "Lord and Teacher". But this differentiation must never serve as a basis for domination or manipulation of any kind: according to the ways of God given expression by the eternal Son, the form that all personal relationships should have is that of friendship and a generous gift of self.

How truly this gesture performed by the Saviour, when his "hour" had come, brings home to us the deep significance of his death, and his gift of himself in the Eucharist – which unites us to his return to the Father as our brother and Mediator. "I have called you friends", he said, "you must love one another as I have loved you". How well this evening's liturgy prepares us for the Easter celebration which we are beginning,

John Thornhill sm