

ADDRESS**18 April 2019****Maundy Thursday**

Exodus 12. 1-4, 11-14

The Passover

Psalm 116.1-2, 11-18

The Lord hears us

1 Corinthians 11.23-26

Institution of the Lord's Supper

John 13.1-11, 21-30**The communion meal***May we proclaim the name of the Lord; and ascribe greatness to our God! (Deu. 32.2-3)***THE POWER OF SYMBOLS**

All our lives we are surrounded by visual images, symbols of what concern us most, identifiers which shape our thoughts and our actions. Your sheet includes nine of these images, ones we might think about this Easter – five secular images and four sacred.

The secular images represent some of the primary concerns of our culture– in the top row, in the centre, we have . . . McDonalds. Many people live for eating and drinking, for going out, or giving dinner parties, or going to parties, or attending functions, seeing and being seen, and simply having a good time. Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, except when having a good time becomes our primary goal.

The second row begins with . . . Toyota. O what a feeling, when we think about our possessions, our toys, our cars, our homes, our furniture, our clothes, the souvenirs we brought home from our travels, maybe our boats, or our model trains, or our coin collection—each to their own. Again, nothing wrong with any of these, except when our possessions become our idols.

Then we have . . . Commonwealth Bank. Banks mean money, for us and for them, and we know that many people seem to think about nothing but money – about how much they have and how much more they want, and how much other people have.

A few weeks ago, the *Australian* included a glossy magazine celebrating Australia's richest people, and how they live; telling us that most of those they mix with are in the list, and how the No. 1 on the list is best friends with No. 2 on the list, and how they share the same interest – which, of course, is money. I looked right through the magazine, but I could not find anyone I knew.

At the end of the second row we have . . . Facebook. Some people spend hours on Facebook and Linked In and Google and other social media, posting pictures and jokes and photos of themselves and children and their friends and their pets, and asking you to like them.

Again, nothing wrong with any of this -- these sites are wonderful for keeping in touch with family and friends, but for some people, they take the place of personal relationships, and take the place of time with God, and can easily make self their God. How many times have you seen two people sitting together in the train or the bus, not talking to each other, but absorbed with their phones?

Then, in the middle of the third row, we have . . . the ladder of success. Some people, women and men, are so absorbed with their careers, with getting ahead, with worldly success, that they have very little time for family, or friends, or hobbies, much less for God. Some even avoid intimate relationships, in case they slow down their climb to the top.

On the four corners of the square we have images relating to God. They are on the edges of the square because, even for many church goers, they are on the outer edge of their lives. They represent the major concerns of a religious sub-culture, rather than of the society as a whole.

Top left, we have the being of God, as revealed to us: God as Trinity, three personae in one God. The ultimate mystery, which we can explore, and theologians can argue about, but which can never be fully understood or expressed in human words or images.

Top right, God's law. God's natural law makes life possible: *God said, let there be lights in the dome of the sky . . . and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years . . .* We hardly ever think about the earth spinning around every 24 hours at 1 600 km an hour, and travelling around the sun every year at 107 000 km an hour, but we would take notice, if God's natural law was broken, and the earth stood still or dropped out of its orbit, or if gravity failed and we all fell into space.

God also has moral laws, which we break at our peril. Some historians see human history as the record of a succession of civilisations which declined and fell when their moral and spiritual foundations crumbled and their *people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play*, to quote the Scriptures (Exodus 32.6; 1 Corinthians 10.7).

Bottom left, we have a symbol of the grace of God, as seen in the gift of the eucharist, which we commemorate tonight, and bottom right, we have the symbol of the ultimate expression of God's love, in the empty cross, which we honour at Easter-tide, if we are not distracted by Easter eggs, or an Easter bunny or Easter fashion.

God's being, God's law, God's grace and God's love -- these are realities which we can all rejoice in, and share with other people, and make sure that they remain central in our own lives, dominant over pleasure and possessions and money and success, even over friends and family.

How often do we say to people, *How has your day been?* It is an invitation to share, to bond, to live **with** another, not just beside them.

Thursday the 2nd of April in the year 33 was a day like no other, in a week like no other, for a man like no other –

Sunday -- Jesus enters Jerusalem to the applause of the people;

Monday – he drives the greedy money-changers from the precincts of the Temple;

Tuesday – he teaches the people in the Temple and then his disciples on the Mount of Olives;

Wednesday – Jesus is anointed in Bethany, as the chief priests and scribes plot to have him killed and Judas comes to them and offers to betray him;

Thursday – Jesus meets his disciples for their last supper together. By washing their feet he demonstrates that loving others means loving them to the utmost, to the end point, to the point of becoming their slave as well as their host. They share a simple meal of bread and wine; but Jesus' blessing gives these everyday ingredients an eternal significance.

Through these symbols Jesus teaches the disciples the meaning of his betrayal and his coming death. Later that night he is arrested, and questioned by the high priest, and denied three times by his chief disciple, as he knew he would be when Peter's time of trial came.

We cannot be sure whether all this happened on the day of the feast of the Passover, or on the day before, the day of preparation for the Passover, but the story, as John tells it, is full of

Passover symbolism – in the foundation story of the Jewish people, God punishes the Egyptians for refusing to set their Hebrew slaves free, but passes over the houses of the slaves, which were marked with the blood of a lamb. In the foundation story of our faith, the slaves of sin, that's us, are set free through the blood of Jesus, the Paschal lamb.

It's a life-enhancing story, but it's also a mystery, which we cannot easily put into words, even the time-honoured words of the liturgy which we are about to celebrate. God in Trinity becomes both priest and victim; God's law is upheld; God's grace is poured out and God's love is demonstrated – but all of this is unknown or ignored by those who worship pleasure, or possessions, or money, or personal relationships or success.

God's love, God's cross, is the heart of our faith, but its redemptive pain is often mocked or trivialised by those with other gods -- those who write about politicians or sports men and women 'being crucified', or those who tell us to *always look on the bright side of life*.

We cannot be sure, either, about how Jesus may be present in the eucharist, how what we do is more than a memorial of the outpouring of God's grace on one of the most meaningful days in world history – we only know that every celebration is a special occasion, when the symbols become reality.

The eucharist, too, can easily be trivialised, when it is carelessly or hurriedly performed, or when people laugh and chat to other people as they come to communion or as they go back to their pew. Sometimes the holy meal makes no difference in our lives. Tonight's Gospel reminds us that Judas shared the holy meal with Jesus, then went out to carry out his plan to betray him. In some way, we all share his guilt.

The Book of Common Prayer well expresses the meaning of the eucharistic gift-- the priest is instructed to give us the bread and say: *Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart, by faith, with thanksgiving -- in your heart, by faith, with thanksgiving*. . If we follow this three-fold advice every time we share the Lord's Supper, the holy Communion, we come closer to knowing God and loving God as he knows us, and loves us nevertheless. We will identify with the symbols of the faith, not with the symbols of the world.

'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift'. (2 Cor. 9.15). #