

March 24, 2016 - Holy Thursday

The Passion of Christ – He wants to eat with you!

Luke 22:14-15

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.



Dear Friends in Christ,

Last Sunday we learned that God is passionate about each one of us, and what happened on the passion narrative, the divine drama with a script written by God and played out within the theater of human history reveals to each of us, the depth and extent of God's, more specifically of Jesus passion for each one, not only his suffering but his deep desire to save people.

The passion narrative does show God's deep emotional love, His passion

for each one, in fact you are his cause. So much that in today's Gospel we would see his deep desire, his passion to seat with at the table and eat just as he was so passionate about seating with his first disciples and eat, thereby instituting what we now know as the Lord's Supper.

The Gospel of Luke shows his passion when he writes: “And when the hour came, he (Jesus) reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

And all begins on this night, with a supper. But as if watching a theater act from a distance we see the beginning. The curtain opens, and the cast of characters arrives on the scene. But away from that, Satan, the villain has already prepared an act of his own. In the prequel and in the form of a snake, moved by jealousy and anger, he was at once powerful and petty, slithering in the slime of his own deceit. But now unable to raise himself up, he brings others down. His misery seeks company. Traps one of the disciples, Judas! There he is.

Judas opens wide his heart, and Satan strolls right in. Some think of Judas as a sympathetic character, a disappointed zealot. But while others were putting money into the offering plate, he was taking it out. The kind of fellow who would betray his friend for a few pieces of silver. A petty thief and a petty man, he reminds us that our own petty sins make us petty and lead to great evil. We do see those traits within ourselves, don't we?

As the play continues, in another scene we see the religious leaders form an ensemble cast, and vanity is their name. An old boys club and network, tied together by perks and privileges, shinning their robes and titles. Their life is a theater, a show of piety to wow the crowds . . . and empty the purses. They love greetings in the marketplace and the best seats at the banquets. They announce their prayers as if holding a press conference. But while they have their thousands, the Son of David has

his ten thousands. Like the wicked queen of Snow White, they are enamored with the mirror but become enraged to hear of a Savior who is more fair and beautiful.

And then there are the disciples. Their love for the Lord is genuine. But while their spirit is willing, their flesh is weak. They were asked to watch in prayer, and what do they do? They fall asleep! They were asked to make a confession, and they did so wholeheartedly but now it seems they can't be counted on to follow through. And, even worse, they share all the same traits as Jesus' enemies, and more, we seem to share in their trait as well. The chief priests protect power in the old order; the would-be apostles play their own game of "Who's on first?" as they compete for positions in the new administration.

Into this web of malice and self-absorption steps Jesus in, the hero of our story. But how shall we describe him? We might describe him as a patient man, a man who knows what must be done and braces himself to do it. Or we might picture him as the pious Son, ever obedient to the Father, doing the Father's will. But if you look closer and consider all the divine drama, we can see more, we see that which stirs his soul, you can see his passionate love for human kind.

And on that evening Jesus shows another passion, hear once more what he tells his disciples: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer," says Jesus (Luke 22:15).

Earnestly desired Jesus says. The translation is far too earnest. The words in Greek are stunning: *Epithumia epithumeō*. "With great desire I have desired." These are words of desire and passion. Of longing, even lust. Jesus, our Lord, is a jealous Lord. Jealous for our affection and our presence. "With great longing, I have desired to eat this Passover." Jesus says!

The ancient philosophers held high and praised the virtues of righteousness, wisdom, courage, and prudence but rejected those virtues against not only immorality, but passion. If you were moved by passions, so the thinking went, you'd be overwhelmed. Your thinking would become clouded, your judgment impaired, and your sense of reason would fly out the window.

These are the people who teach that love is a decision. These are they who think of God only as the sovereign one, who decides all things untouched by the consequences of his actions. These are they who constantly say that we need our Lord more than he needs us—and picture him as a Platonic lover, an unmoved mover, the great immutable. For them, Jesus is reason incarnate.

But this is not the Jesus we meet today. This is not the Jesus who seats with his disciples on that upper room. This is the Jesus who is moved by passion and overwhelmed by desire.

And what does he desire? He desires to save us. From Satan and his schemes, from our Judas-like pettiness, from our preening vanity—and from all the sins committed when our spirit is willing but our flesh all too weak.

But he's not content to save us from sin, from death, and from the devil. He has come to save us for himself. "I passionately desire to eat the Passover with you," he says, hiding nothing. This is a Lord who stands at the door and knocks, so that he might come in and eat with us. The Lord who opens wide his arms, naked to the world. This is a Lord who longs to be our Immanuel, God with us.

We have been encouraged to pay special attention to the Lord's Supper, to hold it highly, we have been also taught not to abuse or misuse it. With good reason! But today God wants us to see the Supper from Christ's point of view. And his point of view is not that you just eat and drink, but that you commune with Him, because, like any real lover, he longs for communion. The human heart will be forever restless, till it finds rest in God. But so also does our Lord's heart cry out for you. He longs to have you for himself. Like a young man waiting for the day of marriage. Like a mother hoping her children will come home for Christmas. Like a father standing at the door, looking out over the horizon for his prodigal son.

Why our Lord loves us so, it's hard to say. But in the Divine Drama, we're the beloved to His lover, He is passionate, he has feelings, and he's willing to do whatever it takes. By the bloody sweat of his brow he prepared a table for you in the presence of your enemies. He'll feed you with new bread and you shall be his own.

Is God passionate about eating with you? Absolutely, the questions is are passionate about his food, about eating with him? About communing with him and him with us? Let us pray that by the power of His Spirit it be so!!

May the eating of His body and drinking of His blood, strengthen our passion for him as we see his passion for us during this passion days.

In His name, amen!