

## HOLY THURSDAY

In a break with tradition, the priests of the diocese came together at the Cathedral at Northampton to celebrate the Chrism Mass yesterday rather than today. There was some murmuring among them at this change expressed in the fear of whether it would work or not. Would all the priests come? Would all the people be there? And also, in a brief outburst by one priest of many years service: 'I'm not here because of the Church or the sacraments or the bishop or the Pope but because of the people. It's the people I serve and I'll defend that before God' – or words in similar vein. And I couldn't help but admire the sentiment – at least he wasn't just here for the meal afterwards! And later during the renewal of priestly promises I heard what I thought was a priest joining in the responses assigned to the people: *Christ hear us. Christ graciously hear us* and I wanted to join in them too – so I did, only realising later that he had joined in because he wasn't a priest but a deacon and one of the people. And this got me thinking about the primacy of us all as the people of God and Christ's putting aside his priestly garments, as it were, to kneel and wash the feet of his people whom the disciples represent here just as much as they come to later represent Christ as priest. To complicate the matter further, I'm a monk and a religious as well as being a priest and this too affected the order of yesterday's ceremony: diocesan priests were to process in first, followed by the religious but the religious really wanted to be in with the rest of the priests as this was, in this instance, our primary identification. Women, of course, didn't get a look in except this year as Dames with the Papal Knights who followed the Episcopal Vicars, Deans, Monsignori and Cathedral Chapter immediately preceding Bishop Emeritus Peter and Bishop David himself – I think there was rag-bag of others after that. It was a grand and confusing spectacle and I wonder whether something of this confusion doesn't stand between us and the reality of what Christ is offering to do for us in the Eucharist, in this Last Supper scene, which in the other gospels and in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, focuses so exactly on the words of consecration. And it's worth recalling the context in which these words are being spoken: Paul is speaking to a body of people whose *'self-serving behaviour betrays Christ's self-sacrificing love'* (NCBC P1251) and similarly, in the gospel accounts, Christ's action is dramatically opposed to the behaviour of the disciples who are almost at the same time arguing which of them is the greatest and which of the others will be the one to betray him – Peter, in this respect, being no less guilty than Judas.

Sin, in other words, is a great leveller so that what the one without sin does in John's gospel is to open our eyes to the broader context of our total need of the broken body of Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When he tells us 'Do this in memory of me' the example we are to follow is one of self-sacrificial love for one another. It's the people that matter, and the order of precedence will be arranged by God: who it is, that is, that we serve next.

Br John Mayhead  
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour