

When my maternal Aunt died in 2008, I was her only living relative, so the job of clearing her house fell to me.

Because my Mum had gone to live with her when my Dad died, I knew there were things of hers there too, including lots of family photos, which I really wanted to find.

But could I find those photos? I searched all over the house, and eventually found them in a cardboard box at the back of the garden shed!!

Lots of curled and faded photos, scattered pictures of the way we were, in a few cardboard boxes.

As I sat down and looked through them, memories came flooding back of my family - all dead and gone by then - smiling out at me from those bits of black and white paper.

We all need to have something of the people we love to outlast them, and stay with us.

We want to remember them but, it seems to me, the further we get away in time from those who've died, a little bit of them fades away bit by bit.

And remembrance is at the very heart of what we celebrate this evening in the Maundy Mass of the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus didn't leave us faded pictures in a cardboard box; He left us something better. He left us Himself.

"Do this in remembrance of me." Never forget me.

But, as I grow older, I know it's easier to forget than remember.

To find myself standing in a room, wondering what I went into it for.

Forgetting my glasses; forgetting my keys; forgetting the name of someone I've known for years.

However old or young we may be, we find it easy to forget Jesus, don't we?

To, as it were, like the photos in my Aunt's shed, put Him away in a box in the garden-shed of my life.

Let's remember; indeed, let's never forget, that those words: "Do this in remembrance of me," are the heart of our Christian faith.

For 2000 years we've gathered around this table of sacrifice: this altar-table which, in this church - and every Catholic church in the world - is linked through time and eternity to the table at the Lord's Last Supper.

The altar-table, where the bread and wine become the Lord's Body and Blood.

His Body and Blood, offered on the Good Friday Cross out of tender-hearted mercy for us sinners.

Those pictures of my family are like misty water-colour memories of the way we were.

They remind me of: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties." Vatican II: Gaudium et Spes; 1 they experienced down the years.

Memories that light the corners of my mind, yet memories that can never be reproduced, never brought back to life again.

If we only had those sorts of memories of the Lord's Supper, and His Death on Good Friday, that's what they would remain - memories.

Yet the Lord's words: "Do this in remembrance of me," draw us to the Cross, and into the Empty Tomb.

For, without the Empty Tomb; without the bodily Resurrection of Jesus; without His promise of our resurrection too, Jesus would just remain a fading memory.

And: "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." 1 Cor. 15: 19

But Jesus is alive, not dead!!

And, as He is alive, He gives of Himself - until He comes again in glory at the end of time - in the form of Bread and Wine as 'viaticum,' food for the journey.

So, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist; whenever we: "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus becomes a present reality, not a distant memory.

However, let's remember that Jesus was not only the Priest and Victim at the sacrificial meal of the Last Supper; He was also Jesus the Servant.

Jesus the 'Deacon;' for that is what the word servant is in its original Greek: and us Deacons are called to imitate Jesus in that respect.

On this night, not only do we celebrate the Real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist; within this Mass of the Lord's Supper we also make really present, Jesus the Servant Lord.

And we do that by washing your feet, which will take place in a few moments.

Yes, it's symbolic of what Jesus did to His Disciples feet at the Last Supper - a job that was always done by the lowest servant - but it should graphically remind us that the entire Church is meant to follow the Lord as humble servants of His.

When He had washed the Disciples feet, Jesus asked them: "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you." Jn. 13: 12 - 15

This evening in Rome, Pope Francis is taking the Lord's words to heart.

Instead of celebrating the Mass of the Lord's Supper in the splendour of his Cathedral of Saint John Lateran, as has been the custom for the Pope for many years, he will do so at the Casal del Marmo Youth Detention Centre in Rome.

There, he will wash and kiss the feet of young people who are being held for crimes, ranging from petty theft up to murder.

Pope Francis is the 266th. successor of Saint Peter; the same Peter who doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet at the Last Supper.

But Jesus gently insists that it should be so; and He says to Peter:
"You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

Jn. 13: 7

Peter understood completely on that first Easter morning after Jesus had risen from the dead: I wonder if we, the Lord's followers today, understand what Jesus wants us to do?

Or do we actually understand, but choose to ignore Him?

Do we prefer to, metaphorically, hide behind the sofa instead of spreading the love of Jesus, the Servant Lord, into His world?

Jesus also said to Peter that: "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me." Jn. 13: 8

We belong to Jesus because we've been washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism.

And our Baptism, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, means that: "As shoes for your feet [you can] put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." Eph. 6: 15

As we begin our journey with Jesus to the Cross, let's feed on Jesus, the Bread of Life, so that we emerge renewed and reborn on Easter morning: "So we may enjoy his banquet for all eternity."

Mass of the Lord's Supper: Prayer after Communion