

One of the great struggles we have when it comes to our relationship with God is the belief that God is really close to us. So often we feel God to be far away, to be distant. As we journey through the pain and suffering of life we desire to reach out to God, we desire some sign from God; we want to know he is there but his presence escapes us. Ask any good atheist. Of course there is no God. Where was God when you need him? Where is God when the world needs him?

Ruth Burrows is an English Carmelite nun who has written extensively about prayer. She says “We imagine a life of prayer to be a growing enrichment, increased light on divine things, on God himself, whereas in reality true prayer is experienced as a growing impoverishment. We must be content to remain always poor if God so wishes, certain that he will stoop down and indeed is stooping down to fill us with himself.

St. John tells us in this evening’s Gospel that, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.” Jesus knew he was going to the Father. So what route does Jesus take? Well this night, Jesus, the Lord and Teacher takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around his waist and as a servant washes his disciples feet.

This night Jesus begins the imminent journey to his crucifixion. He will suffer in great anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane; he will be betrayed, arrested, abandoned by his friends, abused as a criminal. This night Jesus gives us the Eucharist. He takes the bread and says this is my body, he takes the wine and says this is my blood.

Through the Eucharist Jesus is present to us, a presence which is fragile, silent, simple, ordinary and poor. And the Church defines this Eucharistic presence as the Real Presence, the Real Presence of Christ.

And so we look closely at all the angles of this night, look closely at all the facets of Holy Thursday and we see that journey to the Father was not a journey that made Jesus rich. No warm light, no spiritual ecstasies, no spiritual comforts. Instead Jesus in his journey washed his disciples feet; he was betrayed and arrested; he gave us his body and blood in the Eucharist.

It certainly appears to be a journey of emptiness, of abandonment, a journey of impoverishment.