

On Sunday March 25th, almost two weeks ago, at the invitation of the Penn Hills Police I was asked to lead a memorial service commemorating the thirty fifth anniversary of the deaths of Sergeant William Schrott and Officer Bartley Connolly who were killed while working a special detail at the East Hills Shopping Center. To this day, they are the only Penn Hills Police Officers to die in the line of duty. In preparation for the service Sergeant Pat Manning, the event organizer, shared with me a black binder of news clippings, photographs, and police reports from that fateful day. Also included were a number of prayer aids from various memorial services held throughout the past thirty-five years. The title of the binder—and some of the prayer services was striking. “We shall not forget” The families of the deceased, relatives and the Penn Hills Police have not forgotten, In addition to the monument erected in front of the municipal building in honor of these fallen officers and numerous memorial services through the years, the memory continues and remains so fresh. And what was so moving from my perspective was seeing so many police officers present, many of whom never knew these men. Nevertheless, they demonstrate by their presence that they will never forget.

Today the Church celebrates Holy Thursday—a sacred day of remembrance. We remember the night before Jesus died. There is something natural to this act of remembering, for often the words and actions immediately prior to a loved ones death remain freshly etched in our mind. For example, how many of us remember the final days or hours before the death of our parent or spouse? So there is something natural to this remembering.

And yet—there is also something supernatural because what we remember is no ordinary person or simple deed. No, we remember Jesus, the Son of God and the gifts of the priesthood and the Eucharist. Today the priests of our diocese joined Bishop Bradley at the Chrism Mass where we celebrate priesthood by renewing our priestly promise of priesthood.

Tonight in this liturgy we celebrate and remember the mystery of the Eucharist, we recall those sacred words, recounted by St. Paul in tonight’s second reading. Jesus took bread and after giving thanks broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” Then he took the cup and said this cup is the

new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” With the whole church we remember and celebrate this great gift of the Eucharist—the body and blood of Jesus, which we are so privileged to receive any time we gather around this table. This gift is food for the soul and bread for the journey.

St. Augustine wrote about this gift. In fact, he once stated “We are to become what we receive.” In other words, we are to receive the Eucharist—and be Christ for the world.

Jesus attempts to make this point in another way with the washing of the feet. He prefaces it by saying to Simon Peter “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later.” Then Jesus washes the feet of his disciple and says, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you shall also do.”

To be Eucharist for others often necessitates being humble and dirtying our hands. Being a follower of Jesus is not always easy and clean. Tonight, in this church we respond to Jesus’ command by celebrating Eucharist and washing the feet of twelve people who wish to be disciples. How humbling it is to wash their feet for me—and yet it is just as humbling for them to have their feet washed. What a beautiful model of discipleship! And in this ancient ritual we not only do what Jesus did but we also acknowledge once again that we shall never forget the sacrifice of Jesus.

Memory—what a powerful gift. Wrongly used it can bring about death, rightly used; memory is a form of immortality. Of memory, someone once called it—“The sublime miracle of the human mind.” Thank God for memory which allows us to bring the past into the present and to perpetuate the great sacrificial gift of Jesus—his body and his blood. Through this gift we are nourished, strengthened and unified. For all of that then as we receive the Eucharist tonight we not only say “Amen”, but also “We shall never forget”