

Holy Thursday
9th Sermon of Mission
Fr. Tom Elliott
April 17, 2003

Conclusion of the Lenten Mission: A Loving Relationship

KNEE SURGERY

Part of the requirement for being a hospital chaplain at the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences in Little Rock, is observing a surgery. I was scheduled to watch a young woman's knee surgery. Before her surgery, the nurses began preparing the woman by wrapping and covering her up. Within minutes, the young woman was seemingly gone and all that could be seen was her knee. With everyone's attention being drawn to the area of the operation, I quickly lost track of the fact that this was a living, breathing person. I no longer sensed any *relationship* with the patient, only the task that was being performed.

Despite whether we're dealing with surgery or something else in life, it is easy to lose focus of what matters when we concentrate on one specific thing. Over the last seven weeks we have been focusing our attention on the seven capital sins. It could be very easy for us to lose focus of the "big picture" because of our concentration on the details of sin. So what is the "big picture?" It is love.

The great German theologian, Bernard Haring, once explained how it is possible to sin when talking about sin. He described "sinful talk about sin" as any talk about sin that didn't also include talking about love. Everything for a Christian must be grounded in his or her loving relationship with God and other people. Overcoming sin is not about being able to check-off the list the various sins we've stopped committing, but rather it is about growing in a relationship of love. Today's celebration invites us to look at how God's love puts everything in perspective for us.

The Holy Thursday celebration commemorates Christ instituting the priesthood, the Eucharist, and his demonstrating the unconditional love of God. Jesus' action of washing the disciples feet is an example of the love he professed. "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (John 13:2). Christ calls each of us to that same radical love. He invites us to wash one another's feet in various ways each and every day.