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Nowadays many people are struggling with lots of critical diseases like cancer, so hospice ministry has been stressed. Hospice refers to a system of care, where terminally ill or seriously ill patients get care during the last journey of their life. Hospice does not seek to postpone or hasten death. Instead, it seeks to improve the quality of life, believing that all people deserve to live the last moments of their life in comfort, dignity and peace.

As one way for the ministry to achieve this, the last supper program is popular worldwide. In this, the patients share the news of their coming death with their family, design space to finalise their life more meaningfully, or make unforgettable memories with their loving people.

The other day, I watched a Korean documentary show entitled ‘The Last Supper.’ A hospice chef helped a middle-aged man who was dying of stomach cancer have the last dinner with his family. The supper was specially designed for his 13-year-old son who did not know about his father’s impending death.

Although knowing his dad’s condition was not good, it was not easy for the boy to accept the fact; but he could begin to prepare to say goodbye to his dad, reflecting on his love and thinking of how to live after his death. The hospice chef said when the boy remembers the moment later, he might feel relieved or grateful due to the personal time; otherwise, he would suffer from empty or regretful feelings that he cannot resolve. Likewise, the last supper can be a space for those who face death as well as for their loving people.

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After watching the documentary TV program, I revisited Jesus’ last supper with his disciples from the perspective of hospice. I have read the story so many times, and also have made sermons or reflections based on the event until now. However, I have never interpreted the narrative with the concept of hospice.

But, when I revisited the story with that viewpoint, I could find how wonderfully the supper was organised by Jesus. Jesus knew his final moment was coming, and wanted to make a meaningful time with his disciples. Especially, he would have tried to give them time to prepare for his death and think of how to live as followers of Jesus, as the severely ill father did to his son.

Verses 13-15 of Mark 14, today’s Gospel reading, show us a clue to it. Jesus told two of his disciples, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

Many people have interpreted this scene as an example of Jesus’ omniscience and omnipotence. They have tended to regard it as a divine mystery. So did I. However, from the perspective that Jesus had planned the supper thoroughly, I could read that part differently; that is, I think that Jesus would have already visited the place alone before the event.

If Jesus had planned the final dinner carefully for his followers, it would not be difficult to imagine that he would have gone and seen some venues and selected the best place for the last supper. Moreover, Jesus looked to even make a scheme with the owner of the house regarding how to show the venue to the disciples.

What’s interesting in Jesus’ directions to his disciples is the part that “a man carrying a jar of water will meet you,” which was unusual in those days as water jars were normally carried by women rather than men. So, it would have been easy for Jesus’ disciples to find him in the city that was very crowded because of the festival of Passover.

Like this, the last dinner seemed to be thoroughly designed by Jesus. The supper was not just a traditional feast that the Jewish people used to throw in celebrating Passover. It contains Jesus’ sweat and tears for arranging the event, for preparing the future ministry of his loving people, and for finishing his life meaningfully. What Jesus did on that occasion shows us his intention more clearly.

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Interestingly, however, the apostle Mark dealt with the significant event very briefly; he used just 15 verses to illustrate what happened in the special occasion. Compared to the Gospel of John using five chapters for describing the event, Mark’s explanation is concise. But, in Mark’s Gospel we can find the essence of the last supper.

Above all, at the dinner Jesus informed his followers that one of them would betray him. Verse 18 says, “While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” In the passage, the Greek word translated into *betray* is *paradidomi* that means handing him over.

Since the Jewish authorities offered a reward of 30 silver coins for Jesus at that time, the disciples would notice quickly the meaning of what Jesus said. So, according to verse 19, they were saddened and greatly distressed. They might know that being handed over to the Jewish authorities meant the death of their master.

How would they feel? What would they think? The 13-year-old boy, who listened to his father’s impending death for the first time at the last supper, came to my mind. Like the boy, the disciples might have been shocked and not known what to say.

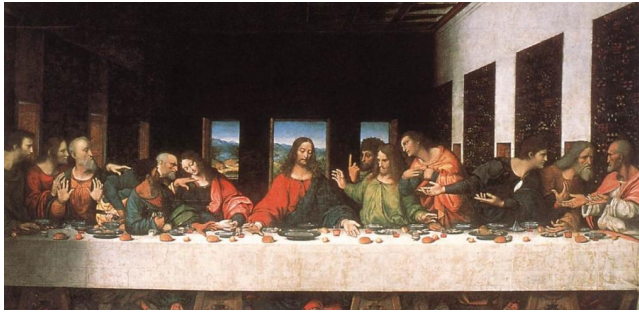
Right then, Jesus gave them the bread and wine representing his body and blood broken and shed for them and for the world. “Take it, for this is my body. Drink, this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many.”

The Holy Communion was the highlight of highlights of the last supper prepared by Jesus himself. The disciples would have remembered clearly the particular time, the place and the special atmosphere as long as they had lived. They might have recalled Jesus’ last, but most memorable hospitality. The memory would have been real support for their faith and obedience as a people of God.

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Many of you may know Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. It was painted on the wall of the dining room of an Italian monastery around 1497. The work is one of the most admired, most studied, and most reproduced paintings of all time.

[#picture]



Lots of artists have painted the event, but his work has some striking features compared to other paintings. One of them is the position of Judas Iscariot who sold Jesus. Do you know who Judas is in the picture?



The frontman in the red circle is Judas. If we zoom the part in, we can see who he is.



Look, his right hand is holding a small bag of money that indicates he was the treasurer of his group. And he stretches his left hand to a bowl as Jesus does, which recalls us what Jesus said in Matthew 26:23: “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.” Like this, Judas is among other disciples, which was rare in the paintings of the story in the 15th century. Most artists positioned Judas at the edge of the company intentionally separating him from other disciples. For he was a betrayer.

But, I think da Vinci’s interpretation is closer to Jesus’ intention of the event. The divine hospitality of the last supper was open even to the betrayers; not only Judas, but also Peter, who denied Jesus three times even with cursing him, were invited to the place of hospice.

His picture shows us symbolically that all of us could be another Judas or Peter anytime, and nevertheless we would always be invited to the Lord’s Table. Jesus is ready to welcome us whoever we are, whatever we have done. This is the spirit of the last supper.

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Sisters and brothers,

The place of hospitality is also open to us; there is a chair prepared for us. Let us sit there, listen to what Jesus says, and enjoy conversations with him. Make our life-context to be a sacred space where we may always feed on the bread of life, and furthermore to be a place of hospice for those who are looking for comfort, dignity and peace. This would be what Jesus expected giving his last hospitality. Amen.