I live at Gesu Parish in Toledo with two other members of my community. Marty Lukas, the pastor of the parish, recently bought a new last supper painting for our dining room. It’s not the typical DaVinci rendition of that scene. It’s by a contemporary Polish artist whose name is Bohdan Piasecki. You may have seen it.

In the painting, Jesus is seated at a table surrounded by disciples. There are seven women, two children and 12 men. All of them look very Middle Eastern.

Oddly, none of them, including Jesus, is portrayed with a halo. In the foreground, to the left on the floor, is a large basin, pitcher and an obviously used towel. Jesus, in the painting, is holding up a piece of matzo bread. There is a wine goblet in front of him on the table.

That painting hangs over a large buffet at one end of our dining room. We have a lovely manger scene that is placed on the buffet at Christmastime each year. The figures in that scene, about 30 in all, look like they’re right out of the Renaissance period.

So, here’s the scene in our dining room: Nativity set on the buffet just below the painting of the last supper. I’ve been thinking about the juxtaposition of those scenes even since the manger scene went up a few weeks ago.

Notice that we often refer to the Nativity scene as the “Manger Scene.” In the Gospel reading we just heard, the angel says to the shepherds, “This will be a sign for you. You will find an infant, swaddled and lying in a manger.”

We have a tendency to romanticize the manger, and thus to lose its sign value. A manger is a feeding box.

Words from Isaiah ---
“They shall name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast.”

Paul says to Titus —
“The grace of God has appeared.”

“And this will be a sign for you.”

A lovingly swaddled infant, lying in a feeding box. What does that sign point to?

At the Last Supper, Jesus takes bread and wine, prays over them. Again, a sign pointing to a deeper reality. Broken bread, wine poured out – our real food . . . what nourishes . . . what sustains us through it all. This simple act of a love that is unimaginably deep. This will be a sign for you.

Do this in my memory – do this love in my memory.

Jesus is so often portrayed in the Gospels at a MEAL, feeding people . . . feeding us . . . in profound ways.

Last evening I was at the house of my nephew, his wife and their two, now young adult, children. My sister and brother-in-law were there, too. We had a simple gift exchange and a meal. For me, the gift that said “This will be a sign for you” came at the end of the evening when I was getting ready to leave. As I opened the back door to go to my car, there was my grand-nephew cleaning the new-fallen snow off my car. He’s now in his mid-20s and a reporter for the ABC affiliate in Dayton, Ohio.

That was a reminder that feeding one another is about much more than food. We are called to swaddle one another. We are called to remind one another, in this sometimes cruel and fickle world, that “The Grace of God has appeared.” We are called to remind one another that the “Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace whose dominion is vast”
comes to us swaddled and lying in a manger
And this will be a sign for you!

We’re about to gather at the Eucharistic table once again in his memory.
May this be a sign for us all, calling us to live into
and be for one another a sign of the depths of God’s love for us all.