

## MAUNDY (COMMAND) THURSDAY

Exodus 12. 1-14

1 Corinthians 11. 23-26

John 13. 1-17, 31b-35

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Today is Maundy Thursday, the beginning of the Triduum; and the Scripture readings that are appointed for the day take us on a spectacular journey through time. We start by going back some 1,500 years before the birth of our Lord; and then we focus intensely on Jesus's words and actions at his last supper with his disciples. These words and actions will then have implications, leading right up to the present day and into the future.

The Old Testament reading provides a description of the first Jewish Passover, which was and is the annual ritual meal in which Jews commemorate their exodus from bondage in Egypt by the hand of the Lord. It was God who first afflicted the Egyptians with plagues, and then led Israel through the Red Sea to freedom. In one sense, we could say that the first Jewish Passover celebrated a miracle, that is, the preservation of Israel from destruction; and that every Passover Feast celebrated since then is the 'making present' of that same on-going miracle. God continues to save his people so that they might be in a covenant relationship with him and honour him.

It is this same Jewish Passover meal that Christ celebrated with his disciples in the Upper Room.<sup>1</sup> But this Passover meal has special significance: it is the day before our Lord's crucifixion. Jesus is aware that the Jewish leaders, his own religious authorities, have been plotting against him. They are determined to condemn him as a blasphemer<sup>2</sup> and as a Sabbath-breaker. In doing this, they hope to convince the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt 26. 17-25; Mk 14. 12-21; Lk 22. 7-18.

<sup>2</sup> since he made himself out to be equal with God and called God his own Father.

Roman overlords that Christ is a dangerous disturber of the peace. Our Lord is also aware that Judas Iscariot, one of his chosen twelve leaders, will betray him; in fact, Judas is about to do this that very night. Jesus's death is imminent.

So during the Passover meal, Christ takes bread, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread, and gives it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And when supper was ended, he took a cup of wine, again giving thanks and saying, 'Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' Our Lord was not only interpreting for the disciples what was about to happen; he was also connecting the disciples, for all time, to his sacrificial death.

The Eucharist, or the Sacrament of our redemption, is not unlike the Jewish Passover meal in that it continues to 'make present' an on-going miracle. At the last supper which was the first Eucharist, Jesus celebrated another miracle: that his sacrifice is life-giving, soul-saving food unto eternal life. Since that first Eucharist, this miracle has been 'made present' and repeated in countless times and places under many hundreds of kinds of circumstances, down to the present day and even tonight. We celebrate Christ's death until his coming again. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast.

Lest we mistake this Sacrament for a mere religious ritual and remembrance, our Lord went further at that last supper. He got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and girded himself with a towel; and then he washed his disciples' feet. This was to be not so much a Sacrament like the Eucharist, but rather an illustration of the kind of service his disciples are to demonstrate across the board. There are no 'high horses' in the Body of Christ. Disciples are to climb down from pride and minister to one another in love and charity.

Elsewhere, Jesus spelled out what this ‘foot-washing’ means: feeding the hungry; giving drink to the thirsty; clothing the naked; visiting the sick and the imprisoned; and welcoming the stranger. For inasmuch as you do these things to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do these things to me. Clearly, Christ means that we are to take him literally; but also more broadly, because there are so many ways to be hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned and a stranger. Our Lord takes all of our ministrations of such kindness personally, and he says to us, ‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.’

In case you have ever wondered, the word ‘maundy’ in Maundy Thursday is actually a shortened form of the Latin word ‘mandatum’, which means ‘command’. To put it another way, Maundy Thursday is ‘Command Thursday’. The choice is before us; or perhaps I should say, *there is no choice*. Loving one another in service and humility is what we must do.

Let us learn and practise gentleness toward one another; let us be kind and courteous; let us be generous and forgiving; let us show forbearance, patience and affection. The love of Jesus shines from the Cross; it feeds us; it enables us to do this. Are we willing to give it a try?

Amen.