

## KNOWLEDGE, LOVE AND ACTION

Exodus 12. 1-4, 11-14  
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.

You might not have noticed it, but our Gospel passage is actually set in two separate time frames. Verse 1 of John 13 tells us that it was just ‘before the festival of the Passover’. Indeed, if we look throughout John’s Gospel, there are numerous references<sup>1</sup> to the Jewish feasts, the dates of which have been determined by the design of God. But verse 1 also tells us that ‘Jesus knew that his *hour had come* to depart from this world and go to the Father’. Until now, at different stages in our Lord’s ministry, his time had not yet come;<sup>2</sup> but as the final Passover feast drew near and Christ turned toward death, he announced that his time, or his ‘hour’ had finally come.<sup>3</sup> This hour was one that was also determined by the design of God,<sup>4</sup> and it was an hour that was to mark the moment when Jesus would depart from the sphere of everyday events and life. Interestingly, in John 13, the two separate time-frames – the Passover feast of the Jews and the hour of Jesus – are joined. They intersect and become one.

There are several things that our passage reveals to us about this special moment in time, or this intersection of the Jewish feast and our Lord’s hour. We see firstly that this hour was an *hour of knowledge* for Christ. Not only does verse 1 tell us that ‘Jesus *knew* that his hour had come to depart from this world and to go to the Father’; verse 3 says that ‘Jesus (*knew*) that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God’. During this hour,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jn 2. 13, 23; 4. 45; 5. 1, 9; 6. 4; 7. 2; 10. 22; 11. 55-57; 12. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn 2. 4; 7. 30; 8. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jn 11. 55-57; 12. 20-24, 27-33.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn 2. 4, 4. 21, 23; 7. 30; 8. 20; 12. 23, 27.

our Lord is given the *knowledge* that the events leading to his Passion, crucifixion and resurrection are starting; and he is equipped to face this series of events by the *knowledge* of his identity in God.

But this hour of knowledge is not without its dark side. In verse 11 of John 13 we read, ‘For (Jesus) *knew* who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”’ In this hour, our Lord *knows* that the devil has already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray him. We see that this hour of Christ is marked by knowledge of a plan of betrayal designed by Satan.

This intersection in time which brought together Jesus’s hour and the Feast of Passover was special for another reason: it was an *hour of love*. Up until now and during his ministry, our Lord had gathered his disciples together, had spent time with them and had loved them. But now, as Christ’s hour comes, he prepares to give his disciples a supreme demonstration of his love for them. During this hour, which will actually carry on in time through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus will show his disciples that he loves them in a way that surpasses all imaginable loving; and this love for the disciples will be shown until the very end of his life.

Against this backdrop our Lord, acting out of his union with his Father, and knowing both his origin and his destiny, moves into action. We read in verse 4, ‘(He) got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.’ Christ’s knowledge and his love for his own now take expression in action. This hour of Jesus is an hour of knowledge, love and thirdly, action.

As our Lord goes into action, Simon Peter is puzzled. Poor Simon Peter! Jesus’s actions and the foot-washing are part of God’s design, but Peter’s objections

indicate that he has no understanding of Christ's motivation for performing them. Yet the foot-washing that takes place in this hour of knowledge, love and action is highly symbolic. With the hindsight of the cross, we (alongside Peter) can fully appreciate what our Lord is doing. In washing the feet of his disciples, Christ is foreshadowing his cleansing sacrifice on the cross. In the wonder of his self-giving love, Jesus is about to go to the cross and submit to slaughter on our behalf as God's Passover Lamb, in order to wash us clean from all sinfulness and guilt.

There is also a second symbol that can be associated with the foot-washing of the disciples' feet, and that is the symbol of baptism. The image is not specifically that of baptism by water, but rather of baptism by death. To quote the Apostle Paul in Romans 6: 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.'

These two symbols behind Christ's foot-washing of his disciples' feet have definite implications for us and for the Church-at-large.

Concerning foot-washing as a sign of the complete spiritual cleansing that Jesus offers us, we are obviously led to ask a crucial question : 'Has Christ washed us?' His sacrifice was offered for us on the cross, and we receive it by an act of simple, personal faith. We come in faith to Christ, and we allow him to wash us. There is literally no sin which he cannot cleanse in this way. All guilt can be forgiven; even those sins that we would be ashamed to admit to any other person.

As far as the second symbol is concerned, if foot-washing points to our baptism with Christ in his death, in order to 'have share with Jesus', we must be ready to show the same self-giving love that he so perfectly showed in his sacrifice of

himself on the cross. As our Lord says in verse 14, ‘So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done for you.’ Later on in our passage, Christ will emphasise this when he says, ‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another’ (13. 34). How are you and I practically called to be humble and loving in our lives at the moment? It is a huge and vital question.

Just as Jesus lived his hour of *knowledge, love and action*, so are we to do so. We *know* that we are called to follow the example that our Lord left us; it is an eternal example of self-abasing humility. We are therefore called to live it out in our hours of *love*, by showing the same self-giving *love* that Christ incarnated throughout his life and death. Finally, knowing that we belong to God and that all of our true identity lies in him, we are called to fill our lives with hours of *action*, hours in which we do specifically, in humility, what Jesus has called us to *do*. In exercising this knowledge, love and action, we will be blessed.

As we finish our meditation tonight, I would like to remind us of something that we tend to easily forget. Just as our Lord lived an extraordinary moment in time when his ‘hour’ of knowledge, love and action intersected with human history and the Jewish Feast of Passover, so you and I have the privilege of living in two separate time-frames that intersect. We all, each one of us, are living in the general time-frame that God has ordained for us; a time-frame that starts with our birth and that will finish when God calls us to him. And yet we also have a marvellous opportunity to look at that ‘standard’ time-frame differently, and to act in it differently. Will we today decide to *seize* and *embrace* the ‘hours’ of knowledge, love and action that have come to us?

Tonight, tomorrow, and in the coming weeks, we have a choice. We can go on living life as if it were a simple timeline; or we can decide to punctuate that timeline with 'hours' and moments that stand out in eternal terms. Our hour and time have come!

+ Amen.