

Sermon for Maundy Thursday | 2016
By Fr. Hayden A. Butler

Lectionary Readings:
I Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

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Maundy Thursday takes its name from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “command.” This draws our attention to the command that Christ gave to his closest disciples the night before His Crucifixion. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” When we tease out the grammar a bit, it reads this way: “Love one another. In the same way and to the same degree that I have loved you, so you should love one another.”

And so we must consider the example of Jesus. How did Jesus love us? The Gospel lesson provides-- with stark clarity-- the love of Jesus in His enduring sorrow, betrayal, humiliation, suffering, and death. “Greater love has no man than this,” He said, “that a man would lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus will most perfectly manifest this love in the Crucifixion tomorrow. Tonight, though, how can we follow his example?

Tonight Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. We know that this was an intimate evening for the group. We know that the twelve disciples were there. It was customary when one entertained guests to allow them the means to wash their feet. In homes which had servants, the lowest ranking servant was provided to wash the feet of guests.. And so it came as a shock when Jesus assumed this role. He was the rabbi, the leader whom the disciples thought was about to overthrow Rome and start a kingdom in Israel. And yet there He was washing feet. In washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus--the eternal Person of the Trinity, the One by whom and through whom and for whom all things were made--laid aside His honor in order to serve.

We must remember that two of those feet belonged to Judas Iscariot, the man that Jesus *knew* was about to betray Him to the authorities. Jesus leaves no act of humility unfulfilled--He has washed the feet of the man who betrayed Him to the Cross.

Tonight, Jesus also fed his disciples. Jesus made His love to live in this most central of human actions, the act of eating. This is something of a reversal. When God gave humankind the Garden of Eden, He said they could eat all things but one. Knowing how that turned out, and with mercy for their all-too-human frailty, He gave His friends this one thing to eat: Himself and the fullness of His life. He gave us this holy act of eating so that in all acts of eating we might be filled with the love of God, sustained for the work of loving one another.

Love is about patterns. The more we love the more our lives take on the shape of the one we love. Love one another...in the same way and to the same degree that I have loved you, so you should love one another. So tonight we start where He started...we wash each other's feet, we celebrate the Eucharist.

These are the patterns of divine love that shape the Christian life. In all times we are called to humble ourselves and to care for the unlovable dirty feet of our friends, and indeed our betrayers. We do not only love the clean and orderly. We must love those who are still carrying dirt from their long journeys. In all times we are called to Eucharist--of taking, giving thanks, breaking irrevocably, and giving to others of what we have received. In doing so all of life becomes filled with the grace of God and the life and love of Christ. When we participate in the sacrament, Christ patterns our lives such that every action becomes an offering to God and a gift we receive back from Him for the life of the world. By partaking of Eucharist, our lives become Eucharist, and Eucharist is eternal.

“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another.” We start now as though in the upper room, among friends and disciples, and indeed among enemies and betrayers--for in each of us both reside. We are here to be trained in love by Christ our example so that we might know and follow Him on the road to Calvary. We enter into the patterns of love tonight in the washing of feet and the breaking of bread so that tomorrow we may witness and remember and participate in the great love of Christ on the Cross, the very shape and pattern of our lives and loves.

And so let us listen to Him now: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you [...] And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”

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