

Maundy Thursday

First, before we begin, let's clear up a couple of concerns:



The name Maundy Thursday is a corruption of the Latin word “mandatum” which means Commandment. Why Commandment? Because Jesus only gave us 4 Commandments—

- Love one another as I have loved you
- As I have washed your feet, so you are to wash one another's feet.
- Do This in Remembrance of Me.
- Go into all the world and preach the Gospel and Baptizing all nations.

And the first 3 Commandments He gave us this night—and so it is called Maundy or Commandment Thursday.

And second, what we do tonight is NOT a Passover Supper. Certainly, we say that Christ is our Passover because it is His Blood shed for us that protects us from Spiritual Death and brings us new life. But, in spite of the words in the Gospels of Sts. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is absolutely impossible for it to be a Passover Supper. Why? Because that would mean that Jesus was crucified on the Passover, and no Jew would have allowed that—to have a person crucified on the Passover would have been a sacrilege and would have defiled the whole city. Instead, the Church follows the dating by the Gospel of St. John, which specifically says that the Passover Lambs were being sacrificed in readiness for the Passover at the same time as Christ was dying on the Cross.

The Eucharist is based on a Chaburah Meal, a fellowship religious meal of a Teacher with His disciples, that Jesus and His disciples had often had. Only Jesus changed it radically—in the middle of the meal, Jesus took Bread and Wine, blessed them, and said “This is My Body; This is My Blood.” In this way, Jesus transformed that Meal into a magnificent way for us to Make His Present, and to Join in the Offering of His Sacrifice for us.

Tonight, as we do every Sunday, we are going to follow what He taught us, together with the Washing of the Feet, as He becomes present right here with us. We will end the service with a remembrance of His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, his arrest, the desertion of the disciples, and experience the closing powers of darkness. There will be no formal end to the Service tonight—you may stay for a few minutes in prayer and then leave quietly when you wish.

To understand what Jesus was doing in giving us the Eucharist this night, you need to know the Jewish concept of Sacrifice that went on every day in the Temple. In simple words, this is what happened at a Sacrifice:

- a LAMB was taken by the worshipper to the Levites near the door of the Temple
- the Lamb was KILLED and the Blood was collected in a brass bowl
- The Blood (representing Life) was OFFERED by the priest at the Altar.
- A portion of the Lamb was taken home by the worshipper and EATEN in a family religious meal. All who ate of the Lamb received the benefits of the Sacrifice as if they had actually been there.

Every Jew knew this pattern by heart, and every male Jew had participated in it at the Temple. So, Jesus used that well known pattern to offer Himself as the perfect Sacrifice for sin.

- Jesus was called the LAMB OF GOD by St. John the Baptist. That is the technical name for the Sacrificial Lamb at the Temple.
- Jesus DIED ON THE CROSS
- Jesus ascended into Heaven and there offered Himself as the Perfect Sacrifice to the Father on our behalf.
- Jesus gave us, before He died, the way to EAT HIS BODY AND BLOOD in the Eucharist.

By sharing in the Eucharist, we can do 2 things:

- we can join with Him in OFFERING HIS SACRIFICE, and
- we can receive His BODY AND BLOOD into us to receive His Power

It is this Miracle that we celebrate tonight. It all began here. By giving us this powerful Sacrament, Jesus was committing Himself to his Death on the Cross the next day. And giving us a way to join with him wherever we are. Down through the centuries, in giant cathedrals and tiny churches, on festival Sundays or quiet weekdays, in thanksgiving for a new Birth or in gratitude for a holy death, we have followed His Command to “Do This to Make Me Present among you.”

And when we “Do THIS,” we join with the Saints and Angels, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, here and everywhere in making Him Present on our Altars and in our Lives. Thanks be to God.

Amen