

Today is, as you all know, Maundy Thursday. This word comes from the Latin “mandatum,” which means commandment. Today is the first day of the Triduum, comprised of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. This is the holiest time of the Christian calendar; in it, we step back through the centuries in our spiritual imaginations to watch again how Christ suffered for us. On Holy Saturday, we watch and wait in anticipation of the celebration of the resurrection, which is of course the culmination of everything.

By why do we focus upon the word “Maundy,” or “Commandment,” on this day? Many sources naturally point to the Gospel of St. John 13, verse 34, a little past where our gospel reading this night ended. In this verse, Christ says, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” This should certainly contribute to our understanding of the meaning of this day. We are commanded to love each other, and that not as the world thinks of love, but as God thinks of love – sacrificial, self-forgetting, love. But we also have demonstrated for us this night by Christ Himself, two distinct means whereby He shows us just what it means to love each other.

First, we have the establishment of the Lord's Supper. Now certainly this is a demonstration primarily of our love for Jesus. In the epistle lesson this night, St. Paul recounts for us what Christ said as He gave His Body and Blood for His disciples. “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. ... This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” And then St. Paul continues, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.” Now we take these words to mean that the Body and the Blood of Christ, broken and shed for us and received by us, binds us to Christ. We take His Body and Blood as symbols of His death, His sacrifice for us, into ourselves. By so doing we die with Christ; His death is our death. But more than that, we do not forget that He is no longer dead, but is alive, reigning in heaven and superintending the work of His Bride the Church in this world. So likewise, His resurrected life is our resurrected life. The life is in the Blood, the Blood is in us, therefore the Life is in us. The food of the broken Body of the Lord nourishes us, manna from heaven, the Bread of Life, feeding our souls. This sacrament is therefore rightly called the sacrament of our union with Christ.

But beyond this, in Christ we have union with each other. All of us who partake in this Holy Sacrament are bound together in the grace of the sacrament. We are one body, just as Christ is one body. We are one holy temple, made up of each holy member, Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone. We are the Holy City in which God with man continually dwells. And we are the bride of Christ, suffering for the love of her betrothed, being purified and made ready for the final consummation. The highest act of love that we can show towards each other is to love Jesus Christ with all of our heart, and with all of our soul, and with all of

our mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, the greatest *mandatum*.

And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. In St. John 13, we read tonight that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. In that day, this was a job reserved for the lowest of servants; and yet Christ takes on the garb of a servant and then performs the actions of a servant setting for us the example that we are to follow. This is not an optional activity, this is a *mandatum*. “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

The logic here is pretty straightforward. We are to obey Christ if we claim Him as our Master and Lord, and therefore we must serve each other. There is no choice here. We are to wash each others’ feet, taking upon ourselves the garb of the lowliest of servants and ministering to each other in the greatest humility. Now also notice that none of the disciples asked Jesus to do this. He did it of His own volition, and it was a requirement that they submit to His service. Peter—of course it is Peter—is shut down when He protests, and is then shut down again when He presumes to take too much upon Himself. In serving, we are to take the initiative with each other, and we are also to submit to the service rendered to ourselves. There is no place for being afraid of being honest with each other about our needs. We must call for help, and we must be quick to answer such calls. We must be proactive about meeting each others needs.

Does the service we render depend upon the worthiness of the recipient? Well, consider that Jesus washed the feet of all of the disciples, even the feet of Judas Iscariot. This was the man that, in a few short minutes after having His feet washed by the Lord of Creation, the Second person of the Trinity, would go to the priests and would then bring them in the middle of the night to arrest Jesus. Was there any man ever unworthier? Yet, Jesus still served Judas in lowliness, and I dare say even in love.

Do we therefore presume to judge each other as to whether or not another person is worthy to receive our service? No, certainly we may not pass such judgement. We are to serve all as Christ served all without regard to station in life or manners of behavior. The love of God is directed to every person, that as many as receive Him would become Sons of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus died for that man or woman or child whom we may arrogantly deem unworthy of our attentions. Every human being is indelibly marked with the image of God, and that is what makes them worthy. Let us fear to behave this way. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Let us not be one of those who our Lord Christ rebukes, “Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

How then shall we serve each other? Yes, in love, but practically what are the things that we should do? What do we do? Well, the first thing is to pray for each other. God has

brought these, your brothers and sisters into your life both now and for eternity, and you may not know them very well, you may not like them very well. (But don't be dismayed, they may not like you either!) But you are required to love them and to serve them, and the first step is to pray for them. Let God grow His affection in your hearts for each individual and each family, by your lifting them up in prayer, by your interceding for them to the Father, through the Son, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we need to be willing to open our lives to each other. This is difficult because it makes us vulnerable, at least in our own thoughts, and when you have needs that go unmet, it does feel hurtful. But we still need to work toward this direction in our parish. Let others know that you need help, give them the privilege of meeting a need, of serving you, and of loving you in real tangible ways.

These things are not optional. They are "*mandata*," commandments. Love the Lord your God, be united to Him, proclaim His death until He comes again. Then be united to each other. Live out the sacrament in your lives, make the Body of Christ evident to all through our love for each other as manifest through our service to each other.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.