

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2017
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
I CORINTHIANS 11.23 JOHN 13.1



DO THIS UNTIL I GET BACK...

Holy Scripture is the story of a Rescue Mission. It is a great story of what God did and what he continues to do to pull us out of the messes in which we find ourselves. Holy Scripture is a promise God keeps on fulfilling, namely, to liberate us from all that enslaves us—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

- a. Our calling to be part of what God is doing (just as he called the apostles: commission, come follow me)
- b. And our calling to pass on what we've been given; passing on the tradition—the Rescue Mission has to be renewed

We witness both the calling and the passing on throughout Holy Scripture:

We see it in the Jewish Passover feast, where it is ordered that the youngest will ask "Why are we celebrating this night?" and the elder will pass on the reason: God's passing over the homes of their forebears, delivering them at the Red Sea, giving them the promised land. The elder passes on the heritage, passes on the tradition, passes on the story, and so enlists a new generation.

We see it in the way Jesus invited all sorts and conditions of people into his fellowship, talked with any who had ears to hear, ate with them, made a place for them against the protocols of proper behavior of his day.

We see it when Paul teaches about Baptism and about the Holy Eucharist, saying "I pass on to you that which was passed on to me"—how he took bread, broke it, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying "This is my body" and after supper took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying "This is my blood."

Neither predicted by anyone nor disclosed in advance by Jesus were the events of tonight...the night that forms the bridge between the Old and New Covenant...or Old Deal/New Deal...events hinge the Old and New Testament!

From the Latin *mandatum* derives the word Maundy...hence Maundy Thursday...day of mandate ...commandment...DO THIS...

The Twelve are with Jesus for what seemed to be a normal Passover meal...the Seder. But

Jesus broke stride from the normal course of the Haggadah...the Seder ritual.

... "He took bread and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and said take this and eat it...this is my body, broken for you... and then he took the cup and gave it to them recalling the covenant Moses recorded from the Exodus and Isaiah wrote in his prophecy "this is my blood of the **new** covenant...do this...as often as you get together..."

Jesus gave instructions that have been followed throughout Christendom for a hundred thousand weeks since that day...that mandate...commandment is what brings us to this very place at this very moment!

That part of the evening ended and Jesus began what St John relates...to show them how they should treat each another, as **servants** of each other and of others. He meant what he said and so there would be no doubt he washed their feet.

When finished he sat them down for a final conference...told them "I will not be here much longer." Then he concluded saying..."I have one final thing to tell you...this is a new order...it is simply that you **love** one another." It was simple and straight forward He put no conditions around that commandment...so we have no right to be so presumptuous as to water it down and add options.

A new dimension of Love was being instilled into the Twelve...how long it took them to actually get the message and put it into consistent practice is unclear...it **is** clear that we need to do just what they were told...be the servants of Jesus and the servants of each other and of those whom we do not yet know.

When all was concluded Jesus said to them...now come and spend an hour praying with me.

With great thanksgiving we take a momentary respite from the rigors of Holy Week to concentrate upon two things...

- The unconditional love **we** are commanded to give
- Passing on that which we have been given...renewing the Rescue Mission

