

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2018
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
I CORINTHIANS 11.23-26 St. JOHN 13.1-15



DO THIS UNTIL I GET BACK...

Tonight we continue a week of stark contrasts. We began the Maundy Thursday Liturgy on a high note...the Celebrant wears white vestments...the *Gloria in excelsis* not heard since the last Sunday after Epiphany is sung. Our mood is festive.

The word *Maundy* is derived from the Latin *mandatum*...the day of the *mandate*...the day of the new *commandment*...DO THIS...Jesus says...until I get back.

The words *mandate* and *command* tell the story...we do this because Jesus tells us to...what we do here is not optional...we do what all Catholic Christians have done through two millennia.

Jesus actually gives us two commands tonight...during the Jewish Passover Seder commemorating and celebrating God passing over the homes of their forebears...making certain they got through the Red Sea safely...and delivering them into the Promised Land.

The first command gives new meaning to the Passover Supper...Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks he said, "This is my body, broken for you"...then he took the cup and gave thanks again and said, "This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you...do this as often as you get together...until I get back".

Jesus is the Lamb of God of our Passover Feast and through the shedding of his blood...he is our "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world"...once and for all...for all time...an action never to be repeated.

Saint Paul reinforces the reason we are here tonight and why we celebrate the Mass every Sunday in his teaching about the Holy Eucharist..."I have received from the Lord what I am passing on to you...how Jesus took bread, broke it, gave thanks, and said, "This is my body", and after supper took the cup and said, "This is my blood."

The second command is remarkable and caught the disciples off guard. It was customary for the dinner host to furnish a bowl of water and towel for his guests to wash the dust off their feet. The guests washed their own feet...or if they or their host were wealthy...a servant washed the guests' feet. It was considered the lowliest of tasks.

Jesus turns this around...another act of "Divine Reversal"...and washes his disciples' feet. Peter objects and doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet. "Peter", Jesus said, "if you don't let me wash your feet...you can't be my disciple. I'm doing this so you will all know what it really means to follow me. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you."

Jesus knew time was short and gives us a new commandment...we are to love each other as much as Jesus loves us...when we DO THIS...we are honoring Jesus' command. At the time the disciples' pride got in the way of their understanding what Jesus was saying...we must not let our own pride get in the way of our duty to love each other...love means doing what's best for others.

The commandment Jesus gave us to love each other is unconditional...we may not place any restrictions on who we choose to love...Jesus' love for us is what brought us here to night...we may not keep his love to ourselves...we must gladly share his love.

Tonight's Liturgy concludes with a procession to the Altar of Repose...our Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks us to take a break from our busy lives and spend just one hour with him. The Watch has begun...we have to get ready for tomorrow.

A final act of preparation...we strip the Altar and Sanctuary bare. The Tabernacle...God's house...is open and empty. The lights are turned off...we leave the church in darkness and in silence. Yes...this is a night of stark contrasts.

We leave here tonight grateful for the gift Jesus has given us in his Body and Blood...renewing our commitment to keeping his new commandment to love others as much as he loves us. We will continue to...

...DO THIS UNTIL HE GETS BACK!

