

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2019
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
I CORINTHIANS 11.23-26 ST. JOHN 13.1-15



DO THIS UNTIL I GET BACK...

The Maundy Thursday Liturgy is about stark contrasts. We begin on a high note. Celebratory white vestments instead of somber violet are worn...the *Gloria in excelsis* not heard since the last Sunday after Epiphany is sung.

The word *Maundy* is derived from the Latin *mandatum*...meaning *command*. Jesus gives us two commands tonight: We are to celebrate the Holy Communion of his Body and Blood...showing his death until he comes again; and we are to love each other in the way he loves us. There is no opt-out clause for either of these commands.

When Jesus took bread and wine and blessed them and gave them to his disciples he gave new meaning to the Passover Supper. He said...THIS IS MY BODY BROKEN FOR YOU...THIS IS MY BLOOD SHED FOR YOU. He didn't say this represents my Body and Blood or this symbolizes my Body and Blood. He said **THIS IS MY BODY AND BLOOD**.

Saint Paul wasn't present at the Last Supper but his teaching on the Sacrament is the primary reason we are here tonight and why we celebrate the Mass every Sunday. Paul tells us what he received (from the other disciples) he passes on to us. We believe what we receive is the real Body and Blood of Jesus and no mere symbols because he said they are his Body and Blood.

The second command Jesus gives us is to love each other as much as he loves us. Jesus showed how much he loved his disciples by washing their feet before the Last Supper. It was an extraordinary act for the host to wash the feet of the dinner guests...but Jesus tells us to act toward others in the same way he does.

Jesus consistently showed unconditional love and it is the unconditional part of Christian love we often find the most difficult to cultivate in our own lives. But the events we commemorate on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday show us exactly how much Jesus loves us and we must try to emulate his love.

The celebratory tone at the beginning of tonight's Liturgy will soon give way to the somber preparation for Good Friday. The Blessed Sacrament will be carried in procession from the High Altar to the Altar of Repose...our version of the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks us to stay with him just one hour. The Watch has begun.

Tonight's Liturgy concludes with the Stripping of the Altar. The Altar will be washed...symbolically this recalls Christ's stripping and preparation of his body for burial. The Washing of the Altar is an ancient custom of the Sarum Rite...the Liturgy of the English Church dating to the 12th Century. It is quintessentially Anglican.

The Tabernacle...God's house...is open and empty. The Sanctuary Lamp is lowered and extinguished. The lights in the church are turned off...we leave the church in darkness and in silence. Yes...this is a night of stark contrasts...light will give way to darkness...but not forever.

Everything is ready for Good Friday. For tonight...we leave grateful for Jesus' gift of his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar which...and prepare our hearts and minds for his ultimate sacrifice of love...a love we are to share with others.

What we do here tonight is not new...it isn't empty Liturgy or meaningless ceremonial. We follow what Jesus tells us to do and Paul tells he received and passes on to us. We do what Catholic Christians have done for centuries. We follow Jesus' commands...

...DO THIS UNTIL HE GETS BACK!

