

## MAUNDY THURSDAY (2022)

When we celebrate the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, we remember two great gifts which Jesus gave us, the night before he died: the gift of the Holy Eucharist AND the gift of New Commandment.

- A) Our First Reading, from the book of Exodus, gives us a description of the very first Jewish Passover. It is an account of how God saved his people from slavery in Egypt, and brought them to the freedom of the Promised Land. Through Moses, God promises to inflict on the Egyptians the last and most terrible of the ten plagues: the smiting of the firstborn, of man and beast alike. The Hebrews are to sacrifice lambs, and use the blood to mark the entrance to their homes. This blood will be a sign to the Angel of Death to "pass over" the Hebrew households. The flesh from the animals will provide them with a final meal before they set off on their journey to freedom. The Feast of Passover has been celebrated in Jewish homes ever since, not only to remember God's great saving act but also, in that very celebration, to unite themselves with their ancestors all those centuries ago.
- B) In the Second Reading (from the first letter to the Corinthians) St Paul describes the Last Supper. In this final meal before his death, Jesus begins by celebrating the Jewish Passover with his disciples. But he transforms it. **Jesus** is the paschal lamb whose blood will save us from our sins. **His flesh** is given to us in Holy Communion as food for our journey through life. The words of consecration look forward to his sacrifice on the cross: this is my body which will be given up for you. This is the cup of my blood; it will be shed for you and for many... Like the Jews, we recall the Last Supper, not simply to remember a past event, but above all, to unite ourselves with Jesus and his disciples; to be at one with him in his self-giving to the Father and to others.

C) Curiously enough, the Gospel reading for this evening does not mention the Holy Eucharist at all. Instead John provides an account of the New Commandment, or in Latin, the Mandatum (from which comes the word Maundy.) It is Christ's own commandment, that we are to love one another as he has loved us. Jesus gives a practical example of that love in the washing of the feet of his disciples. In doing so, Jesus takes on the role of a slave, a shocking gesture which Peter finds so hard to accept. But unless he allows Jesus to serve him in this way, Peter can no longer be a friend of Christ. Jesus then says, I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. These words are the equivalent of, "Do this in memory of me" So, whether we are offering ourselves to the Father and to others by our sharing in the Eucharist, or whether we are giving ourselves in humble service to others, we are "doing this in memory of him."

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