

Maundy Thursday SSP 2020

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen

Tonight begins what is called the Triduum, or the Great Three Days at the heart of Jesus's Victory on our behalf. The Three Days are Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil and first Mass of Easter on Saturday evening. They really are one continuous observance.

Before anything else, we would do well to focus on that term, Jesus's Victory on our behalf. The events set forth in these services, beginning tonight, are not what the world normally calls victories. But that is just what they are. In the Apostle's words, The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Take these words with you as you meditate on the Great Three Days.

Maundy Thursday is a teaching liturgy like no other. The restrictions imposed on us by the coronavirus prevent the doing of much of this beloved liturgy. But I want to describe it and ask you to use your memory and your mind's eye. It begins in festive style which reminds us that Jesus really is the Priest over these events of Holy Week in which the world would say he is the Victim. He teaches through the means of actions at his Last Supper with his disciples. The air is thick with dread as the apostles sense death approaching. The Lord takes this on directly with the bread and the wine at the supper. This is my body...this is my blood. That is: my body, which is broken for you, and my blood which is shed for you. Continue this in remembrance of me.

But then, rising from the supper, Jesus stooped to wash his disciples' feet. This offended Peter, until Christ said, if I do not wash you, you have no part in me; whereupon Peter consented. Not only were the disciples to continue in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood; they were to wash one another's feet as a symbol of humble and loving service. This I command you, that you love one another as I have loved you, said the Lord. The title for today, Maundy Thursday,

derives from the Latin Mandatum, that is the mandate. This time, because of the mandate of physical distancing for people's safety, our mandate is to remember and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

During the supper, Judas left, and went out into the night on his errand to betray Jesus. What Jesus had explained in terms of his sacramental actions was soon to happen before their eyes. Jesus had time to escape, but he went out into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. It was his Agony. He sweat blood. Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done. The Blessed Sacrament is displayed on the Altar of Repose, symbolizing Gethsemane. Over and over Jesus prayed, until the answer came: Judas leading his captors to arrest him.

Peter and James and John, the inner circle of disciples called at the start of Jesus's ministry, saw all this from a distance in the Garden of Gethsemane. And so we may pray while viewing the Sacrament online, keeping the watch in our hearts. The liturgy, like the story itself, continues tomorrow at midday.