

Maundy Thursday Homily 040110

In the name of Jesus Christ who said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Amen

Maundy Thursday – the night of the new *mandatum*, or Commandment, that we love one another just as Jesus loves us – is a night full of remembering.

On this night we remember many things. We remember *that* night on which Our Lord was betrayed by Judas Iscariot; the night in which He was taken away and the Disciples all scattered in fear for their lives. But before that, we remember Jesus washing their feet and teaching them the final great truth about servant ministry – that you cannot *make* people believe by *force*; instead you teach and lead them by becoming their servant, loving them with pure, undefiled love. Through all of this Maundy night though, there is a *deeper* stream of remembrance running – and not just a stream, but a wide and rushing river of remembrance.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus and the Disciples were either celebrating, or preparing for the Passover (depending upon which Gospel account we read). They ate that same meal of lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and wine that has been prepared and eaten for thousands of years in *remembrance* of the night that the angel of death “passed over” the houses of the Israelites; and the night that began the *Passover* of the Jews from slavery in Egypt into freedom and their own promised land. God spoke to Moses on that first night and told him how the Passover meal was to be prepared and eaten – and then what was to be done to mark each house so that those inside would be

kept safe from death. And God told Moses, “This day shall be a day of *remembrance* for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance (or commandment).”

And so it was that on the last night that Our Lord spent with the Disciples, it was the time of the Passover, the time of *remembrance*. St. Paul and the synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus had a new Passover to celebrate with the Disciples, after the meal was over. In Paul’s words:

(O)n the night when he was betrayed (Jesus) took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in *remembrance* of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in *remembrance* of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Hebrew word for what we know as Passover is *pesach*. Through Greek, into Latin and finally into Middle English, that word changed to *Pasch or Pascha* and finally to Paschal. The children of Israel sacrificed a Paschal lamb – a year old male, without blemish – as an offering and sacrifice to God. The Paschal lamb was eaten by the people, but his blood was splashed across the door posts in order to mark the people as “saved” from the hand of death. And God said, “For as long as you exist as a people, do this in *remembrance* of me.”

For almost one thousand five hundred years after Moses and before that night in the upper room, people had eaten the Paschal meal and remembered what had happened to their ancestors – and how faithful God had been in delivering them from slavery in

Egypt. But on that night – almost two millennia ago now – Jesus not only remembered the commandment from God to Moses, but He perfected the commandment.

Jesus – the male without blemish – **BECAME** the Paschal lamb for us.

On the night He was betrayed – now think about *that* phrase for just a minute. On the same night that one of His closest followers was going to hand Him over to people whose stated goal was to have Him killed; on **THAT** night, a night in which He would be handcuffed and led off to be interrogated and beaten for made up crimes; on **THAT** same night, He took bread and broke it and **gave it** to all of His followers, including His betrayer.

The bread that He broke was to represent, to remind – to trigger **remembrance** – of His body, which was about to be horribly broken. And He gave them that Body and told them to eat it – like the Passover meal – as a memorial, a remembrance. But because **this** Paschal lamb was truly the perfect offering, His broken body was not to be **just** a remembrance – but was also intended to provide spiritual sustenance and an unbreakable bond between Jesus and His followers until His return.

And after His friends has shared His broken body; Jesus passed around a cup of the Passover wine – and told them, “Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in **remembrance** of me.

So on that night when He was to be betrayed – and when those who had *not* betrayed Him would scatter and hide (or worse, deny that they knew Him) – on this night, He poured out His blood for those who believed in Him. The certainly did not deserve it, but He poured it out for them. And rather than spreading the blood of the Paschal lamb on the doorposts and the lentils, to keep death from visiting their houses; this perfect Paschal Lamb poured out His blood and told them to take it into themselves – to be transformed by it, to be saved from the terrible death that comes from sin and separation from God, and to *remember* the sacrifice that He had made for them; but not only for them (those with blood on their door posts), for the whole world.

This is a night of remembrance. As we begin the foot washing, *remember* that St. John tells us this story in relation to the Eucharist so that we can understand the context of Eucharist – the taking into ourselves of the Body and Blood of Christ. Eating Christ’s Body and drinking His Blood can *only* be the powerful sacrifice for us that they were intended to be, if we use them to give us strength and courage to follow that new commandment – that Maundy – that Jesus gave us on that Paschal night:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Do THIS in remembrance of Him. Amen.