

Maundy (Holy) Thursday

‘Maundy’ comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning “commandment,” reflecting Jesus’ words: “I give you a new commandment.” That commandment is: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

In Jerusalem, when Jesus sat at table with his disciples, households were celebrating the Passover feast. On the table were unleavened bread (*matzah*), four cups of red wine, bitter herbs (*maror*), charoset (fruit/nut paste), a green vegetable (*karpas*), salt water, and a roasted lamb.

During the meal, the youngest present would ask four questions: “How is this night different from all other nights? Why do we eat only *matzah*, only bitter herbs, dip our food twice, and recline while eating?” In response, the eldest would retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

While all were celebrating the past event of the Exodus, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future: “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which *will be shed* on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus alone knew that on the very next day his blood would be shed, while the others remained unaware. He knew that all would abandon him and flee, and that he alone would drink the bitter chalice of his passion and death.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to show them the value of humility and service, thereby establishing the sacrament of priesthood. He then broke the bread and shared the chalice of wine, saying, “This is my body... this is my blood. Do this in memory of me,” thus instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist. Christ established the priesthood to perpetuate the Eucharist, creating an unbreakable link between the two sacraments.

On this Holy Thursday, the priest, acting in the person of Christ, will wash the feet of twelve people representing the twelve Apostles. For a priest, ministry so deeply defines his life that without it, his life loses its meaning. Hence the Vatican II defines the priesthood by the descriptive title, 'The Ministry and Life of Priests.'

At the conclusion of the Mass, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament will take place within the church, followed by a time of silent adoration. In the breaking and partaking of the Bread, we experience the presence of God with such intensity and intimacy; it is in that moment that we truly celebrate His Real Presence in and among us.

I invite you all to join us this Maundy Thursday. Together, let us worship God and celebrate the commandment of love, the virtues of humility and service, and the institution of the priesthood and the Holy Eucharist, and the real presence of Christ in our midst.