

Sermon for April 2nd, 2026
MAUNDY THURSDAY

READINGS

Psalm 116:12-19

- 12** What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
15 Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.
16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

John 13:1-15

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, **4** rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."
12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **16** Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Our text for meditation this Maundy Thursday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In their last night together, before He was crucified, Jesus washes the feet of the Apostles. Now, in those days there were no clean paved roads and most people traveled on foot. These same roads were dirty and dusty, and those who could afford a horse or a camel would travel on them: this meant that manure would get on every pathway. People wore sandals to protect their feet from sharp rocks or broken glass, but they had no expectation of keeping their feet clean as they walked from one place to another.

When someone returned home after their workday, they would wash their feet before going inside if they could – either that or they would have a servant wash their feet for them. Living in the first century A.D., under no circumstances did you want to have dirty feet when you got home. If you walked inside with dirt and manure on your feet, then you were inviting crawling insects, flies, and rats to come in as well: they would follow the nasty smell, make their way into your home, and then find your food. Everyone would get sick very quickly.

Our Lord and the Apostles must have been in a hurry to set up the Passover meal, because their feet were unwashed. This ought not surprise us, since the Passover feast is a busy time, and while everyone is making their preparations (getting a roasted lamb and bitter herbs, making sure everyone was *ritually* clean, etc.)¹² few people are bothering with small details like foot washing. Jesus, seeing this, decides to rectify the situation and cleans the Apostles up before they can begin the meal.

St. Peter is taken aback by this act, and we can easily see where he was coming from. To clean someone's feet was something that servants and slaves did, and to the Apostles it would have been unthinkable for Jesus to do what a lowly servant does. They rightly understood that He is the Messiah, the King of Kings that every Israelite had been waiting for since the prophets spoke of Him. After Palm Sunday people were treating Jesus like a King – why on earth would He then stoop down, undress, and clean the Apostles' feet?

Christ makes it clear that this is necessary, so much so that if St. Peter had not received it then he would have been cast out from the Twelve. You see, Jesus is being a role model for them in the most unmistakable way, by *doing* something for them, and they must experience this in order to learn a crucial lesson. It is one thing to say words to teach someone: it is far more powerful to do what you want them to do, to *show* them what you mean. And if the Apostles are going to lead the Church, then they must do as He did.

In the sixteenth verse, Jesus says “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” In other words, He is saying to the Apostles, “I am not too dainty or too aristocratic to serve, so neither should you. I am willing to serve those beneath Me as though they were above Me, for that is what it means to be above them in the eyes of God. *Go and do likewise.*” Though Jesus is quite literally the King of the entire universe, He is willing to wipe horse poop off of the feet of sinners, and He demands the same of anyone who would be Christian.

The essence of Christian charity, or how we show our love for one another, consists in our willingness to lower ourselves to help others. No one is too disgusting, no one is too embarrassing, and no one is too poor. In the vast majority of places in the world today people do not have to wash manure

1 Numbers 9

2 For readers: yes, there is some debate on whether the Last Supper was a Passover meal or whether it was one day before. Our position is that it was a Passover meal, but the references in John's Gospel to a Day of Preparation are for the Feast of Unleavened Bread: since the Feast of Unleavened Bread is considered to be *part* of the week-long Passover observance, the Jewish authorities later conflate the two when they ask Pilate to expedite the crucifixions so as to be able to eat it (John 19:14).

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Day-of-Preparation.html>

and dust off of their feet, but Jesus is making a larger point. To help a homeless man and give him food; for children to befriend the weird kid in school; to visit the elderly or disabled in their care homes; to help the prisoners – all of these, *all* of these are the same as washing someone's feet. They are acts of servants, and Jesus tells us that we must never think of ourselves as being too rich or too high-status to do it.

Unfortunately, the unbelieving world does not see it that way. The rich men, the politicians and the celebrities all think of themselves as being too much “above” the poor and downtrodden to lift even a single finger to serve others. But for us Christians, people that have been delivered from their sins and promised eternal life, we must be *different*. Christ is King of all reality, yet He still washed the Apostles' feet; so too must we, the princes and princesses of the Kingdom of God, be willing to stoop down and cheerfully help others – *without* complaint or demanding reward. Instead of sneering at someone who is an outcast, let us confess that no one is an untouchable in the eyes of our Lord: as God has loved us, so must we love others.

The Church thrives and grows because of this humility. First this applies to our fellow believers, as Jesus says “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.” The Apostles – and all Christians – were instructed here to take care of other believers **first**, and to treat them as equals. No matter how much authority a pastor or bishop might have, he is not allowed to play Pope and demand that people kiss his ring or bow down to him. No, for however much authority a man may have in the Church, he has that much more responsibility to be humble before his brothers and sisters in Christ. Just before the Crucifixion, this command was all the more important to obey: the Church was going to be persecuted by the jews, the Romans, and by savages wherever they went. If Christians did not support one another and help one another, then they would be siding with those groups that persecuted believers. This remains true to this day: if you refuse to help other Christians who are in need when you have the means and the time to do so, then you should be ashamed of yourself. To neglect your brothers and sisters in need, when you *know* that you could make the difference, is to be a persecutor yourself.

Now, the Scriptures do tell us that we must exercise wisdom in the process of charity. Scripture tells us to help people that are *actually* in need, not to enable laziness or fraud.³ We are not called to spend every last penny we have on others, and we are still told to save money and enjoy normal time with our families. One man cannot help everyone in the world either, we must make proper choices about *who* we help. But all this Scriptural exhortation to be wise in our charity *assumes* that we have the will, motivation, and desire to obey Jesus and be charitable for other Christians. We are not to look for excuses not to help; instead we are told that we must be wise so that we can be the most helpful.

And let me say it strongly, this is not just about Christians taking care of other Christians. Oh no my friends. This extends to the stranger and to the poor in your area as well. God knows who will convert to the true faith, even when we do not. He wants us to have the same general good will for humanity that He does. He even sends angels to the world, disguised as humans, to see whether we will help the stranger in need.⁴ But first, for the sake of the Body of Christ here on earth, we must love one another, showing it by “washing each other's feet.”

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

3 1 Timothy 5

4 Hebrews 13:1-2