

Holy Thursday B (4/09/09 – *The Holy Supper of Our Lord*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

A couple of items that bear further contemplation this evening. The first item that may have caught your attention was the “title” of this night in Holy Week – *Holy Thursday*. Most of us grew up calling this day: *Maundy Thursday*. So if you looked in the Hymnal, Altar Book, and Lectionary, you might be surprised that they all refer to this day as *Holy Thursday* – as I have on our bulletin. Most of us probably don’t even realize where the name, “Maundy Thursday” comes from – and why in some parts of Christendom (including parts of Lutheranism) this day has been referred to by that name. The *Maundy* portion is an anglo “butchering” of part of the Latin name: *Dies Mandati* – Day of Commandment. *Maundy Thursday*, then, refers in particular to the historic Gospel reading in which our Lord Jesus Christ washes His disciples’ feet and **commands** them to: ***If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*** [JN 13.14–15] It is a command to love one another through service – rather than lord it over one another expecting others to wait on us hand and foot. As Jesus says later in John’s Gospel from that same chapter: ***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*** [13.34]

And this is a good commandment of our Lord – just like all the others. In a sense, though, it is not that “new” – for in the Old Testament already the two great commandments were love toward God and love toward the neighbor. It’s just that Jesus shows us a greater love – a deeper, more all-encompassing, love ... a new degree of love ... beyond any kind of love the world had ever imagined. The Lord becomes Suffering Servant ... the One Who ought recline at the table serves ... the One Who is sinless became sin **for us** ... the One Who is the Lord and Giver of Life loses His life by His death on the Cross. And this all because **we** have not – indeed, **cannot**, by our own reason or strength – fear, love, and trust in God above all things ... or love our neighbors as ourselves. Christ shows us the greatest love – for as He says later that ***Holy Thursday: Greater love has no one than this, that a Man lay down His life for His friends*** [JN 15.13].

We don’t have that kind of love – no matter how hard we try. We don’t love others more than we love ourselves. In fact, we quite often love ourselves more than we love God – otherwise, if we **truly** loved Him as we ought, we would obey His commandments ... every one of them ... not just to the outward letter (like we so often do) but in spirit and in truth. If we truly loved God as we ought – and let His love have its way with us – we would give ourselves sacrificially for the well-being of one another ... even if it meant giving our lives for one another.

Imagine, if you will, a world in which it is not “Me first” ... but “Me last ... least ... servant of all!” What if all of us were so busy serving one another that we almost had to “wrestle” to show love – and **not** for our own personal gain or advantage ... but simply out of love and gratitude for the love God has first shown us? I’m afraid I would qualify for such a world – how about you? Are we not **all** more selfish ... than loving – even to those we do earnestly desire to serve in love ... even toward God?

But back to the point about *Maundy Thursday*. The title places the focus on **our** actions ... in fulfilling God’s command. In other words, that title places the focus on the Law – what we must do. And though we must certainly obey God’s commands, in the end the fulfillment of **all** His commands lies **not** in us ... but in Christ Who has fulfilled them all **for us**. The last word – even the first word – cannot be what **we** must do ... but what Christ has done **for us ... in our stead ... on our behalf ... for our benefit**. Even if we try to understand this *Mandati–Maundy* thing of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper – that is, that we ought, as Christ commands elsewhere regarding His Supper: *Do this in remembrance of Me* [LK 22.19; 1COR 11.24] – we are focusing on the wrong end of things ... once again, **our** obedience to God’s commands. And, once again, though this obedience ought be, it is not the main thing. For God the Creator is the main thing ... and **His** works – only then can the creature (you and me) respond to Him Who made us and sustains us. In other words, what we do **every** day – and also here in the Church – must **first** come from God (as the Giver of every good and perfect gift from above) ... and our obedient reception and worship and love are merely our weak creaturely responses to Him. God always first comes to us – for only then are we able to respond to Him.

And so it is on this *Holy Thursday*, that we remember our Savior’s institution of His Holy Supper – which is the second (and really more important) item that bears our further contemplation. The first thing we consider in this regard is that, although it occurs in the context of the Passover Meal – the Passover Seder – Christ reinterprets that meal and fills it with its new (and everlasting) meaning. No longer can the world celebrate the Passover Seder as it once was ... any more than we can offer the sacrifices of the Old Testament as they once were – for it **all** pointed forward to Christ and His work as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. That is shown us when Christ takes the unleavened bread of the Passover and says: *Take, eat; this is My Body* – likewise when He takes the Passover cup of blessing and says: *Take, drink; this is My Blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many* [MK 14.22, 24; 1COR 11.24–25]

There are some original language details that grab the attention. The first is that Jesus says: *This IS My Body ... This IS My Blood*. It’s in the present tense – a

tense that indicates both the connectedness (communion, if you will) of the subject with the action **and** the continuous, ongoing action. It is as if Jesus would say:

*This Bread that I am giving you ... it really is, also, My Body – the Body that will be broken for you tomorrow on the Cross. And this Cup of Wine I am giving you ... it really is, also, My Blood – the Blood I will shed and pour out for you (and the whole world) tomorrow on the Cross. They are intimately connected together this Bread and My Body ... this Cup of Wine and My Blood ... in a mysterious and most blessed manner ... for the forgiveness of sins [MT 26.28]. When I give you the Bread, connected to it is My Body. When I give you the Wine, connect to it is My Blood. And this will be a continuous, ongoing action. For just as this Bread is My Body broken (though it will not be crucified until tomorrow) ... and just as this Wine is My Blood that shall everlastingly be poured out for you and for many tomorrow – HEBREWS puts it **once-for-all** – just so for as many tomorrows as shall come before My return I will again connect my Body and Blood to the Bread and Wine of the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins to all who believe. I Myself will do this. It matters not to Me if I place My broken Body and shed Blood in My Holy Supper **before** it is broken and poured at (**before** I am crucified) or **after**, I am the Lord, God, Creator – for just as once I commanded the earth to be fruitful and multiply once (and it **continues** to be fruitful and multiply), so also by My one command I make the Bread and Wine of the Holy Supper to be My Body and Blood until **that day when I drink the fruit of the vine new in the Kingdom of God ... with all My believers in the heavenly Banquet that shall have no end.***

How, then, do we receive *The Holy Supper of Our Lord* in a worthy manner? Christ also taught His disciples that on the night in which He was betrayed – by the washing of their feet. For our dear Lord Jesus Christ first washed the feet of His disciples **before** He distributed the Holy Supper of His Body and Blood, thereby teaching them – and us – that we first must be cleansed of our sin ... by means of repentance and faith. Even the account of Judas – the betrayer – teaches us right reception of the Sacrament. It is **not** that we are **ever** worthy to receive such a great gift (by way of sinlessness on our part) – for Judas and Peter alike denied Christ and betrayed Him ... but Judas received the Holy Supper unworthily in that though he lamented his sin of betraying the innocent Son of God, he did not believe that Jesus shed His Blood for the forgiveness of his sins (and therefore, in despair, went and hanged himself) ... while Peter received it not only with repentance **but also** with faith, for not only did Peter lament and weep bitterly over his sins of denying Christ, he also remained to receive the forgiveness of his sins from the mouth of the Savior when He restored Peter threefold on the shore of the

sea of Galilee. Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God – and though Peter fell into deep sin, still, by God’s grace ... by the intercession of Christ [LK 22.31–32] ... Peter was kept in the faith.

So also we, then, do not approach the Altar based upon our own worthiness – but, rather, recognizing our total **un**worthiness because of our sins, we see and believe the One Who is greater than our sin ... the One Who made Himself to **be** our sin ... that He might take all our sin away on the Cross ... the One Who here offers us the fruit of Himself Who is the Living Vine ... the One Who gives us communion with His life-giving Body and sin-cleansing Blood in His Holy Supper.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]