

April 13, 2017

Maundy Thursday Homily: “Last Supper”

Rev. Dr. Len De Roche

Maundy Thursday originates in the Latin version of the Bible called the Vulgate. It's come from the Latin word *mandatum* and means command. It was envisioned as the part of the holy week where we celebrate communion. Holy Week was a busy week since Jesus entered triumphantly into Jerusalem. On Monday, he went to the temple and confronted the moneychangers, chasing them out of the temple. On Tuesday and Wednesday, he taught in the temple knowing with all probability he could not read from the scripture, but spoke from memory. Then was confronted by the temple authorities: he answered their questions with parables and stories and answers they did not understand. Soon he asked his disciples to find a place and prepare a Passover feast. The disciples settled on an upper room in a house outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was a quiet place where Jesus and the 12 assembled for the meal. Before the meal, he washed the feet of all his disciples. In the land where sandals are always used and the roads are always dusty, washing the feet was an act necessity that was normally conducted by servants. Jesus performed the foot washing as an act of humility.

Emerson's decision to leave parish ministry was based on his dislike of the communion service, he believed a ritual foot washing was more appropriate.

This foot washing became a ritual of the early church, and is carried into the Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and the Catholic practice. And it became part of the liturgical washing of the feet on Maundy Thursday of holy week. The Anabaptists and Pentecostals consider it a church ordinance. In Catholicism, it was inserted into the Maundy mass in 1955 by Pope Pius the 12th.

It applied to men only. 2013 Pope Francis washed the feet of two women and Muslims in a juvenile detention center. Last year a Roman missal announced that women's feet could be washed on Maundy Thursday. This is viewed as an indication of more inclusion in the Catholic Church. We won't be performing this ritual tonight, so there should no worry about dirty feet.

As Jesus and the twelve ate the Passover meal, they would've been lain on low pillows. This meal has been called many things, the Last Supper, the Lord's supper as well as Passover supper. It was eventually called the Eucharist or holy communion by the early Catholic Church.

As a ritual feast, it became the center of Catholicism and became referred to as the Mass. Yeah there is some evolution within the meaning of communion. In Catholicism, as the priests bless the bread and the wine, it becomes the body and the blood of Jesus but not only symbolically. This is called transubstantiation. When Luther reformed the church the 16th century, he revised this to consubstantiation which means when the bread and wine entered your body, it became the body and blood of Jesus physically. The reformers of Lutheranism went back into biblical sources and stated that communion was really than joining all the persons to the Corpus Christi or the body of Christ which they meant the church universal. It is from this tradition that Unitarianism and Universalism develops. Why communion become so central to the Christian experience, I find confusing. The real communion of Jesus last meal with his closest friends was so much more than just bread and wine and its subsequent symbolism. Real communion, I believe, is when we sit down when each other and eat a meal. This is why, I believe whenever leaders of anything; countries, industries, or churches want to get to know each other, we do it over food.

You can see it in our coffee hour after church services, this is true communion. The meaning of communion we're taking here tonight is a symbolic journey to be in the community with I would say not only the Christian church but with people of all faith. It is in that Spirit that I invite you to the communion table today.

As the meal concluded Jesus gave his last words and last advice to the twelve and gave them some premonition about what would happen to him and them the next day. Then after the meal Jesus left his disciples and went to Gethsemane to pray where Judas had told he would be found. Then arrested by Temple guards, he was taken to an illegal night session of the Jewish court named the Sanhedrin. For here the events of Maundy Thursday becomes the passion of good Friday. In an ever-evolving and never-ending world, amen.

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