

Today's liturgy carries powerful themes – a theme of deliverance, a theme of service, a theme of betrayal, a theme of agony and a theme of sacrifice. All these themes come together in a tapestry of love: Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” The liturgy tells us of our Lord's last night and Last Supper. It symbolizes his act of servitude in washing his disciples' feet, and teaches us that such humility is appropriate for all that would follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

We borrow from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians to get the language that connects St. John's account of the Last Supper to the institution of the Eucharist. The Maundy Thursday service memorializes for us the institution of our greatest act of worship, the Holy Eucharist. Paul's account gives us what theologians call the “Words of Institution or Consecration,” the words said over the bread and the wine during the Eucharist.

The traditional actions of this service, particularly the foot washing and, at the end of the service, the stripping of the sanctuary, set the stage, if you will, for tomorrow – Good Friday. And, all of this comes together in terms of Passover, ancient Israel's deliverance from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. For Christians, our Lord's sacrifice was a Paschal sacrifice, a Passover sacrifice. Christ Jesus, himself, was the unblemished Pascal Lamb offered to God the Father as an act of atonement. In perfect obedience to God his Father, Jesus gave himself as atonement for the sins of the world. By this act, by one man's death, a St. Paul said, we are deemed righteous and can enter into the presence of Almighty God.

“I give you a new commandment, Jesus said. “Love others as I have loved you. If you will do this, people will know you are my disciples.” In the folk music era of the nineteen seventies, particularly at the folk worship services common among the resurgent Christian youth of that time, there was one song that stood out among the others - “They will know we are Christians by our love.” In our Lord's mind, the trait that best defined the righteous person was the love of God and neighbor. It was the constant theme of our Lord's teaching, and it is the one constant thread that has bound Christians together for over two thousand years – we are known by our love. Tonight is called Maundy Thursday for a reason. The name comes from the Gospel reading for this service, in Latin *Mandatum novum do vobis*, , “A new commandment I give you; love one another as I love you.”

These themes come together for us on the evening of our Lord's betrayal. Tomorrow we will contemplate his trial and his death. Let the foot-washing ceremony take you back to that upper room, in Jerusalem, where our Lord spent his last evening with his disciples, and feel, in the ceremony, the love and the humility of Jesus, as he washed his disciples feet. Let the Eucharist, that follows bind us, with our Lord and his disciples at his Last Supper. When you hear the words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” in our Lord's Aramaic language, he was not talking so much about a memorial to himself as he was talking about being present in the bread and wine. In the act of eating the bread and drinking the wine, our Lord is spiritually present with us, for the wine is his blood and the bread is his body.

Let his presence, his love and his humility prepare us to experience anew the both the horror and grief of Good Friday and the joy and love of Easter Day. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.* You can get this, and all sermons, in a form you can edit and print, by subscribing. [Click here.](#)