

Maundy Thursday Homily 040909  
Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1, 10-17  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the name of Jesus Christ, whose lessons of love and service we seek to follow always, Amen.

John's Gospel is not like Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Fourth Gospel tells the same story as the others, the story of the life, work, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, but it tells the story from a different vantage point, a different angle. Luke's Gospel starts off with Mary getting pregnant. Matthew starts with an explanation of how Jesus was descended from King David. But John's Gospel begins with a poetic and existential statement about Jesus being with God the Father before the world was created. That is only the first example of the distinctive nature of the Gospel of John.

Another great example of John's different focus is in tonight's Gospel reading. Matthew, Mark and Luke – the synoptic Gospels – tell us the story of the Last Supper, expanded versions of the story St. Paul tells us in the 1 Corinthians reading we just heard. But the author of the Fourth Gospel was moved by something very different that night. In the minds of all of the Gospel writers, this was an important meal with their Lord and teacher. After all, He told them always to continue to eat the bread and drink the cup in the same way, in memory of Him. That was a big deal. But this foot washing thing really moved the author of this Gospel.

After they had eaten – presumably after Jesus had taught them about celebrating the Eucharist – He got up from the table and took off his outer garment (sort of like removing a suit jacket) and wrapped a towel around His waist. He took a bowl and

pitcher and began to wash the disciples' feet. John tells us all of this in minute detail; so much detail that you could almost act it out while it was being read; because that's how important John found this event in the ministry of Jesus.

The author of this Gospel seized on a small occurrence in the overall arc of Jesus' earthly ministry and made it a major focus of the Holy Week story. And as is so often the case, St. John the Apostle had some very important things to say to us in this otherwise small story.

I have lost track of the number of times that I have preached from this pulpit the message of the two Great Commandments. Say them with me, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." "Maundy" is the anglicized version of the Latin word, *mandatum*, or "commandment." And at this Last Supper event, John tells us that Jesus gave a new – a third great commandment to the Disciples. On that evening, Jesus commanded the Disciples to "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Jesus taught His disciples about the power of God and the power of His love through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Each time the Disciples ate the Body and drank the Blood, they received Jesus as a true and complete part of themselves – they received the power of Jesus in their lives. But John wanted us to know that there was another part to the lesson of that last evening.

When Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of His disciples, He broke all social conventions. He performed an act that the Book of Exodus said was beneath a slave to be expected to do. Jesus stripped Himself of his outer clothes and knelt at the feet of those whom He loved. And He performed an act of devotion that is so profound, I hope that each of you take the opportunity to experience it someday.

Most people refuse to have their feet washed during Maundy Thursday services because they are embarrassed. We think to ourselves, “my feet are ugly; my feet are rough and misshapen.” And worst of all, “my feet smell bad.” But, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if you hear nothing else tonight, please hear this: we *all* have ugly and smelly feet. And that is precisely the point.

Jesus encountered the disciples’ naked, dirty, ugly and smelly feet. And it was a metaphor for the greater encounters He had with them, and those He wants to have with us. Jesus wants to encounter us in the same way He experienced the feet of His disciples. He wants us to come to Him, naked – without the outer shell that protects us from having Him see who we really are. And He wants us to allow Him to experience the dirty, ugly and smelly reality of our lives as broken human beings. Without our shoes, we have no protection against someone else seeing everything that is “wrong” with our feet. Without the protective barriers we put up between us and God, there is nothing to keep Jesus from seeing every misstep, every misdeed, every misspeak we have ever been guilty of. Jesus wants us to have sufficient faith in His love that we would allow Him to see us exactly as

we are – sinful, broken, and guilty. He wants us to have faith that He will love us in spite of who we are.

Jesus taught the disciples a lesson about being open to His love on the night of the Last Supper. But then He drove the message home the next day.

On Good Friday, Jesus himself was stripped naked – had all of His defenses removed – and was subjected to the ugliest, dirtiest and smelliest death anyone ever experienced. He hung on a cross, completely vulnerable, and suffered as none of us ever will, in order to show us the way to true love.

Jesus loves us so much that there is nothing about us that is too ugly for Him to see. And if we are to love one another just as He loves us, we are called to BE Christ to one another.

Tonight, let your inhibitions go. Remove your shoes – remove your defenses – and come forward. Tracie or I will thankfully wash your feet – or you can wash the feet of someone to whom you would like to show God's love – if you will allow it. Letting down your defenses and being seen as you are is scary. But remember, Jesus showed us the way.

Tonight is the time of Maundy – the commandment to love one another, just as He loves us.

Amen.