

MAUNDY THURSDAY / DIES MANDATI

Text: Multiple Texts

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Tonight, we are here to celebrate the institution of the New Covenant in the Blood of JESUS CHRIST. We regularly take part in the New Covenant through what we commonly call “*The LORD’s Supper,*” “*Holy Communion,*” “*The Holy Eucharist,*” “*The Sacrament of the Altar,*” or as it has traditionally been known, “*The Mass.*”

Therefore, on the night in which He was betrayed, the example JESUS set before us was not that we should wash one another’s feet. Witness the fact that after washing the feet of His disciples’ JESUS did not say, “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” Admittedly, He did say, “*...you should do as I have done to you,*” but more on that later.

I have witnessed the reenactment of JESUS washing the feet of His disciples several times and have often wondered for what reason is this done? Why the theatrics? Is it done to convey some deeper theological meaning? I am sure it will not surprise you when I say that I am a natural skeptic and as such, I suspect not. My suspicion is that on some level it is done to be trendy or to evoke some emotional response in those who wash, as well as those who are washed, and those who are present to witness the washing. Yet, is that what JESUS intended when He washed the feet of His disciples and is that truly why we are gathered here this night?

I have the very same suspicions every time I hear of a congregation’s reenactment of the Seder or Passover Meal. Of the two, I believe the reenactment of the Seder to be the most egregious. As our LORD said, new wine is never put into old wineskins.

You see, with the institution of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant passed away; not because it was not good, but because the Israelites did not hold up their end of the bargain. A covenant is a contract between parties, and all parties to a contract agree to keep the terms and conditions found therein. When one side does not abide by the terms, the contract is considered null and void.

Thus, under the terms of the Old Covenant, the people of Israel were made God’s own people. The Hebrews and God were both under a contract of sorts with each other. In a blessed communion, He would be their God and they would be His people. God gave them His blessings and they, in turn, promised to obey God’s Law. The Seder was a meal of the Old Covenant and therefore, came under the Law. It served to remind the Hebrews of God’s compassion and mercy when He rescued them from Pharaoh and redeemed them from their bondage as slaves in Egypt.

Yet, eating the Seder did not rescue anyone from sin and eternal death; that would only come later with the New Covenant. When it comes to sin and eternal death, the Seder was nothing more than a *shadow* of God's promised eternal redemption in His SON.

So I ask you, who in their right mind, when greeting a loved one, embraces their shadow instead? No one! So, who in their right mind, when greeting JESUS would greet His shadow instead?

We have the Gospel. We have the love of God in the Body and Blood of CHRIST. Indeed, we have JESUS! Why, then, would we eat the flesh and bitter herbs of the Law? Why would we turn back to the Law, when, under the New Covenant, we have the Gospel in the fulfillment of God's promise to forgive our iniquities and remember our sins no more? Why would we reenact the Seder when we have the Sacrament of the Altar—our LORD's very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins? Why eat of a shadow when you have the real thing? Is that not like choosing to eat wax fruit when you have the real thing in a bowl before you?

In ancient times, contracts between men were often sealed with a meal. Yet, not just any meal, but a sacrifice. Such a sacrifice required the taking of an animal's life and the shedding of its blood. For example, Laban made a covenant with Jacob. Jacob, Laban, and their households ate of the sacrifice and thus, all became parties to the covenant. Things were no different when it came to the Covenant between man and God. When God made a covenant with Abraham the covenant was sealed with a sacrifice.

Still, there was something more to the Covenant between God and man—something holy. The sacrifice was considered a sacred event. Like the covenant between men, both parties, God and man, took part. Man brought the sacrifice, but for the sacrifice to be valid, God had to accept it—He had to receive what man had brought. God's portion was burned and the blood of the animal was poured out on the horns of the altar. That was the means of God's acceptance. Man, on the other hand, was required to eat of the sacrifice. His eating was just as much a part of the sacred act as was the burning.

There was another important aspect of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant between God and man. You see, man was not allowed to consume the blood of the sacrifice. The blood of the beast is considered its life. God declares, *"The life of the flesh is in its blood..."* and *"No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood."*

This means man partook of only part of the sacrifice—something was missing; the sacrifice was not quite complete. While man ate the flesh of the sacrifice, God reserved the blood to Himself indicating something was still to be accomplished. That was the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant was undone by man's sin even as our relationship with our God was undone in the Garden by man's sin. At every turn when God showed His love for us, we turned away. It is as though we were somehow immune to God's love. We were unable to return our love to Him, and the Old Covenant sacrifices being incomplete, could not save us. *"For it is not*

possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” Something more needed to be done.

That “*something*” was a more perfect sacrifice. That “*something*” needed to be complete, full, and unlike the Old Covenant sacrifices, it needed to be done once for all, and unlike the Passover Seder, never to be repeated. That “*something*” is the New Covenant in JESUS’ Blood.

In the more perfect sacrifice, JESUS, who is God Himself, invites us to both eat His Flesh and drink His Blood, such that, under the New Covenant, we are to partake of the Blood of the sacrifice. For our life is in the Blood of JESUS given upon the altar for the atonement of our souls. What was imperfect in the Old Covenant in that we were forbidden to consume the blood of the sacrifice, is now made perfect in the Blood of “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*”

In eating and drinking the Flesh and Blood of the New Covenant sacrifice, we, just as the Israelites before us under the Old Covenant, are in blessed communion with our God and He with us. This means that your salvation in CHRIST JESUS is established by sacrifice—not yours but His. By eating and drinking these sacred elements you are agreeing to God’s terms of the New Covenant. The terms? His life for your salvation! When you receive His Body and Blood you become a party to God’s covenant of life.

In the Old Covenant, man provided and God received. The Hebrews were required to bring their sacrifice to the Tabernacle, or later, to the Temple. It is different with the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, God provides the sacrifice much as He provided the Ram in the thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. In the Old Covenant, God received His portion of the sacrifice through the burning of the sacrificial flesh. In essence, the burning of the flesh of the sacrifice was a pleasing aroma to God.

In the New Covenant, God receives the life of His only SON in exchange for the life of the world. In fact, in the New Covenant, God receives the entire Sacrifice, and then, gives the entire Sacrifice, Christ’s Body *and* Blood, back to man. God gives—we receive! When we eat and drink the Sacrifice in faith, we also receive what God has promised—forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

So, now we return to my first point. Tonight, is not about foot washing. JESUS used foot washing just as He used parables—to teach, to instruct, to provide an object lesson. He used the foot washing to prepare His disciples for what was about to come.

Our Gospel text opens with these words: “*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when JESUS knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the FATHER, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*” The hour of JESUS’ innocent suffering and death was upon Him. He goes on to say, “*What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.*”

JESUS had taken a towel, and wrapping Himself in it, He proceeded to perform one of the most demeaning duties of a slave—He proceeded to wash His disciples’ feet. JESUS had already given His disciples His Body and Blood to eat and drink. The New Covenant was now established.

What JESUS would give to the world the next day on Golgotha He had already given this night to them. On His Cross, JESUS fulfilled the terms of the New Covenant, and in so doing, He was showing His disciples in what way they must live and what would be the life of the Church. JESUS demonstrated an example of divine love. He was showing them the extent to which He loved them and how much they must love CHRIST’s Church and Her people. They must be ready to give their lives in service to the Church and Her people!

That night, what JESUS was doing the disciples did not understand. Yet, they would come to know that in that moment, as He washed their feet, God was loving His creation. JESUS humbled Himself, and taking on the form of a slave, it was God, in the Flesh, kneeling before man. Think of it! The HOLY ONE, the KING of kings, and LORD of lords was kneeling before and serving man—serving His creation. Our God was kneeling before you and me, to wash us from every stain of sin. On Good Friday, He forever sealed that Covenant with His Blood.

This is the New Covenant JESUS has left to us—a memorial of His passion that we may remember what He has done and for whom. For CHRIST did not suffer death, giving over His Body and pouring out His Blood, in vain; He died for you!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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