

Maundy Thursday

Principal Service readings

Exodus 12.1-4[5-10] 11-14 The Passover

Psalms 116.1,10-17 [or 116.9-17] I will raise the cup of salvation

1 Corinthians 11.23-26 The eucharistic tradition

John 13.1-17,31b-35 The washing of feet; the command to love

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus washes his disciples' feet

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done

to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

John 13.1-17, 31b-35 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Throughout the ministry of Jesus there is mention that the hour had not yet come (cf. 2.4; 7.30; 8.20). Now, as the time of the final Passover feast approaches, Jesus announces that the time has come (13.1). There are two 'times' running through the story, the feasts of 'the Jews' and the 'hour' of Jesus. Both are determined by the design of God (2.4; 4.21, 23; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23, 27). They now join together as the feast of the Passover is also the 'hour' of Jesus. This is the moment when Jesus leaves the sphere of everyday events. To indicate both the time when this love will be shown and also the quality of his loving the expression 'to the end' is used (13.1). Jesus shows his love to the very end of his life. The design of God clashes, though, with the design of Satan, who enters into the heart of Judas Iscariot. Jesus, though carries on expressing his love, even for Judas Iscariot, as he sets about washing his disciples' feet, like a common servant. Jesus expresses his love through actions.

Simon Peter objects to Jesus' washing his feet (13.6). In this, Peter shows his lack of openness to God's revelation of God's ways in the words and actions of Jesus. Jesus asks Peter to accept the 'now' of his actions, and says that there will be a 'later' when Peter will understand. Something transformative will happen between the 'now' and the 'later' (cf. 12.16). In the foot-washing we have the theme of water again in John. Is it a veiled reference to baptism – through washing to have a 'share' with Jesus (13.8)? Jesus carries out his act of service, although 'he knew who was to betray him' (13.11).

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Judas goes out into the night, and Jesus proclaims that the hour has come for his glorification (13.31). Jesus speaks about his departure, his exodus. His glorification will be seen in his final 'lifting up' on the cross. Jesus' unconditional love is expressed by his use of the phrase 'little children' (13.33). He warns them that they will look for him but will not be able to find him as he is going out of reach of them. He gives them a new commandment: to love one another, which matches the gift of his example. He asks them to love each other 'as I have loved you' (13.34).

Quotations

1

The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.

Barack Obama, 1961–

2

Love each other dearly always. There is scarcely anything else in the world but that: to love one another.

Victor Hugo, 1802–1885

3

Stick to love; it is heavy and it will carry you. Avoid hatred; it is heavy and you have to carry it. It is left to you to make your choice.

Martin Luther King Jr, 1929–1968

Related topics

For further study:

Eucharist, bread, wine, washing feet, covenant, paschal mystery, charity, Triduum, service

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
we receive new life
from the supper your Son gave us in this world.
May we find full contentment
in the meal we hope to share
in your eternal kingdom.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The Sacramentary · Holy Thursday · Prayer after Communion