

Maundy Thursday
April 2, 2015
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“...later you will understand...”

In tonight’s gospel reading we hear about the “*new commandment*.” In fact, the name for this day, Maundy Thursday, comes from the Latin word for commandment, *mandatum*. At the Last Supper Jesus tells the disciples, “*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another...*”

This teaching gives us, what some say, are the two most important words in the Bible, “*as*” and “*so*.” Jesus teaches “*As I have loved you, so you are to love one another.*”

Just hours before his arrest, Jesus washes the disciple’s feet. This is a sign of how the disciples are to serve; a sign of how they are to love.

At this “last supper” Jesus also institutes the Holy Communion of his Body and Blood as he blesses and shares bread and wine. Every Eucharist is a sign of God’s love for us, a love that is stronger than death; a love freely given; a love we are to share, especially with the love-less.

The disciples did not understand this teaching, nor did they understand these two great signs – Holy Communion and the washing of feet. Jesus told them, “*You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand...*”

As the risen Christ shares Holy Communion with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on the first Easter afternoon, their understanding increases and they recognize Jesus. Later when the Risen Christ breaks bread with the disciples on the shore of Galilee, they begin to understand. It takes a long time to understand God’s love, especially when we are confronted with suffering and with death.

Fifteen or twenty years later, before the first Gospels were written, St. Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth, reminding them that the Eucharist is a sharing, a participation in the Body of Christ, in his death and resurrection.

Paul unites his understanding of the Holy Communion with the body of Christ to his concept of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world, witnessing to the power of God’s love, as Christ witnesses to the power of God’s love from the cross.

The renowned Episcopal liturgical scholar of the 20th century, Fr. Massy Shepherd, wrote these words 65 years ago...

“...the gifts of bread and wine symbolize not only our Lord’s oblation of His Body and Blood; they also represent our own life and labor and all we possess. Thus in a wondrous and indescribable way, the Eucharist unites the memorial of our Lord’s sacrifice in His

*Incaruate Body, the re-presentation of that sacrifice in His sacramental Body, and the continued offering of His sacrifice in His mystical Body, which is the Church.”*¹

In every Eucharist we celebrate this incarnational, sacramental, mystical union; we celebrate the sharing of our lives here and now with Christ's passion and glory.

So as we draw near to Jesus at the Last Supper and, then, in the Garden; as we anticipate his suffering and death tomorrow; as we look to the unity between the Body of Christ on the cross with the Body of Christ, the Church, with you and with me, we might ask ourselves:

1. What does the church mean for my life?
2. How in our lives do we share the power of God's love, the power of the cross?
3. What do we still need to understand about God's love?
4. How can new life overcome death?

Exodus 12:1-14a
Psalm 1:1, 10-17
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹ *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*: Massy Shepherd; Oxford Press; New York; 1950 (Eighth Printing 1973); pp. 81-82.