



At A Distance – Maundy Thursday “The Eye of the Storm”

Greetings Saints, and welcome to our celebration of Holy Thursday, or in “Anglican language” ...Maundy Thursday. The word “Maundy” is derived from the Latin word “mandatum” which translates as “command”. Mandatum refers to Jesus’ commandment recorded in John 13: “This is a new commandment that I give you. Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my Disciples...” There is so much going on theologically, sacramentally and liturgically on this Maundy Thursday evening. Let’s explore that... but first, let’s step back for a bit of context.

Many of you know that Mona and Jennalee and I spent 6 years in the Dominican Republic. For those of you who aren’t that well acquainted with Caribbean geography, the Dominican Republic occupies the island of Hispaniola along with Haiti right in the center of “hurricane alley” in the Eastern Caribbean. Each year, during hurricane season we would experience at least one and sometimes two or three tropical storms and hurricanes up close and personally. We would “shelter in place” using a phrase that we have all come to know intimately and ride out the storms. Torrential rains, massive flooding, wind damage and a recurring cycle of devastation. One of many things that you learn quickly living in Mother Nature’s crosshairs is to appreciate the “eye of the storm”. The eye of the storm is an eerily beautiful yet anxious time. We have experienced massive meteorological turbulence of nature’s knock-out punch, clockwise spinning winds and rain...and then absolute peace and quiet. The sun re-emerges, the rain stops, winds speeds drop to zero MPH and we experience absolute and total *stillness*. It is a beautiful and most welcome respite from the storm, we seemed to appreciate the stillness, quiet and sunshine because we know that there is a lot more of the storm to come. So, we relax as best we can, take a deep breath physically and spiritually and make ready for Act 2 of the storm. The massive winds, spinning in the opposite direction. The worst of the storm...yet to come.

Our Maundy Thursday is much like our “eye” in the storm that is Holy Week. A beautiful, yet brief respite from the historical fury and spiritual turbulence that is Holy Week. Tucked quietly between the passion and public frenzy of Palm Sunday, the intrigue and drama of Spy Wednesday, and the horror and loss of Good Friday...Maundy Thursday stands as the spiritual and liturgical “eye of the storm”. In the quietness, intimacy and shelter of the Upper Room amazing things are happening. Not the Last Supper as it is sometimes referred to...but the First Supper as I like to call it...the first of many to come for generations and centuries of Christians. Maundy Thursday’s “First Supper” is the genesis of three powerful cornerstones of our Jesus Way walk. Three final “gifts” of Jesus before the catastrophe of Good Friday.

The First Gift , is the amazing example of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Leadership professionals tell us that “leadership is always demonstrated; it is never announced.” True leaders model the behavior that they want to build in others and Jesus takes this final opportunity to model the message of peace and humility from the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, one more time by doing the unheard of...teacher washing the feet of the student, leader washing the feet of the follower, Messiah/Son of Man/ God’s Son washing the feet of humans. A powerful example...given at the end of Jesus’ ministry....so that we pay attention and remember! The Gift of Humble Leadership.

Next on the Maundy Thursday’s- “First Supper” menu, is the birth of the Sacrament of the Table. The birthday of the ceremony and sacrament that we have come to know as Holy Eucharist. Jesus leaves us with this most amazing tool of spiritual connectivity. A way to “tap into” the immanence, the closeness and the intimacy that is our God. A way to continue to re-live, to remember and to celebrate the beauty of the “First Supper” held in the “eye of the storm”.

Jesus left us with two powerful, and amazing Sacraments during his time in public ministry. And like the true leader that Jesus is, he demonstrated both Sacraments for his followers...Baptism with John in the River Jordan and now the Sacrament of The Table in the Upper Room. Jesus told us...” Whenever you want to be with me in a special way...***Do This in Remembrance of Me or in another translation...Whenever you do this, I will be with you.***

We are re-gifted this amazing sacrament, this spectacular tool to connect with Creator each time we celebrate our Liturgy of the Table. When we say our Words of Remembrance the **Anamnesis**..." On the night before He died for us, Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when He gave thanks to you, He broke it, and gave it to His Disciples and said; "Take eat, this is My Body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of Me." And when we say our Words of Consecration, the **Epiclesis**: "We pray you, Gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these Gifts, that they may be the Body and Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your Son in His Sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through Him being sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Through this Ceremony: we remember; we are re-united with Jesus; and we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Remembered-Reunited-Sanctified. The amazing, recurring gift of The First Supper.

And now the final piece of the Trinitarian Gifts of the Evening of The First Supper..." **The New Commandment**". Here in the Upper Room, in the "Eye of the Storm", Jesus makes sure that His Disciples and us have one last "take-away". Jesus distills His teachings and His 3 years of messaging into one last and final condensation. If we are ever along with the Disciple's to understand the Message of the Jesus Way...we need to understand it now. Jesus' time is running short. There can be no misinterpretation or confusion. Probably the most shortest, important, poignant, and direct "call to action" that Jesus ever spoke. The New Commandment...all encompassing, always relevant, universally applicable. Jesus is telling His Disciples and Loved Ones, if you can remember only one thing....Remember This! "Love one another as I have loved you!"

And then, the Eye of the Storm that is Maundy Thursday completely enfolds us. All is quiet, serene in the Upper Room. The Portal of Tranquility opens the Sun breaks out shining. And there lying before us are today's Three Blessed Gifts wrapped as only Jesus can: The Gift and Example of Humble Leadership – "The Washing of the Disciples Feet" ; the Gift of Reconnection, the Sacrament of the Table, and The Gift of The Commandment...The Mandate/man-date...simple-direct..."Love each other".

And now tonight, like long ago in the 1st Century we only have moments to accept, believe, shelter and live these Gifts of the First Supper before the storm is on us again. Ferocious, unyielding, treacherous and laced with danger. The Time

of Trial begins yet again, after this brief respite...sheltered from the Storm. But now everything is different, all has changed. We do not stand buffeted by the Winds of Life unprotected and unprepared. For now, we have all that we need. We will never be alone, distanced, separated from our Jesus ever again. For our Beloved Jesus has promised us..." Whenever you do this...I will be with you. Whenever you do this, I will be with you." Let the storm come...all is ready.

Blessings, and See you Friday – Always, Father Joe