



Maundy Thursday

Thursday 29th March 2018

Keynote: Where there is charity and love, there is God

Book of Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14

The Jewish Law sets out the precise instructions for the annual observance of the Passover Meal that each household held to celebrate the liberation from Pharaoh, and their freedom from slavery in the land of Egypt. This was not just a meal, but also a religious experience in which the participants, young and old, re-enacted the hasty meal of departure immediately before the flight from Egypt. It is also a celebration of hope, awaiting the expected return of the Messiah. This ritual is the focus of Jewish family religious life, and was one of the chief ways in which the history and religious experience of the people was to be passed down the generations. *'That night, the flesh is to be eaten, roasted over the fire; it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. You shall eat it like this: with girdle round your waist, sandals on your feet, and a staff in your hand. You shall eat it hastily: it is a Passover in honour of the Lord... for all generations you are to declare it a day of festival forever.'* This evening the Christian community recalls its own story of freedom.

Responsorial Psalm 115 (116) – A song of thanksgiving for deliverance from death

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 11: 23-26

Paul writes to his Christian converts at Corinth, to remind them: *'For this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread... and he said, "This is my body, which is for you, do this as a memorial of me." In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said: "This is the new covenant in my blood."* With the added command that whenever they celebrated this Passover meal, they should renew, and re-present his death. So, *'Do this in memorial of me'* is no simple exercise of memory, but making the actions of Jesus re-present in this moment. We make present the death and resurrection of Jesus until he comes in glory. *'Until the Lord comes,'* says Paul, *'every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death.'* We are assured the presence of the Lord among the faithful, is for now and for all time.

Gospel according to John 13: 1-15

The evangelist describes that Last Supper meal which Jesus had with his disciples. Note the unheard of event – the Lord and Master – washing the feet of his own disciples. Only a slave or house servant would have performed such a menial task, or in some cases the youngest person present. John may have been that youngest person, who was surprised when Jesus rose to take his job! *'When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. "Do you understand" he said, "what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly, so I am. If then, I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'* The presiding priest, or bishop generally undertakes this duty in the Liturgy this evening, not as an empty token, but as a meaningful gesture, that this is the true meaning of 'ministry' – of service to the People of God. The bishop is the servant of the faithful, rich or poor, in sickness or health, young and old alike, slave and free, all entitled to same service of love, as if each were Christ himself.

Note: Two celebrations may be associated with this day. One in the Cathedral Church where the Bishop, clergy and people assemble to consecrate and bless the Holy Oils to be used in the celebrations of the Sacraments in the year ahead. The second is the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, celebrated in every parish church, in which the faithful recall the evening meal in which Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, making a New Covenant in his blood.