

# Maundy Thursday 2019

## Final Marks of the Faith

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We are called to be Christians...that is, followers of Jesus Christ. And we must seem like a strange lot to those outside the faith. Some despise us, some put up with us and others see us as people who want to be moral and upright. Regardless of the position the cultures around us take, we must be true to each other and to those of the faith around the world. If our common connection is in Christ then we have a responsibility within that body for the very well being of that body.

When considering the events of Holy Week I would have you dwell for the time we have together tonight on three Holy Week events that Jesus lays within the hearts of those who will accept and act on his salvific offer. There is a strong bond behind the actions of Last Supper, the implications of Christ's foot washing and the disciples slumber in the Garden of Gethsemane. The order of these events seem to be intentional as one leads into the other in such a way as to prepare us for what will come later at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit will descend into the very hearts and souls of mankind. Christ, knowing that the cross lay before him, puts the final marks on what will become the Christian faith.

*"For I have received of the Lord, says Paul, that which also I have delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:"*

Have you ever stop to think about the Holy Table...the bread, the wine...the very words of Consecration, instituted by Jesus himself? We are privileged at every Communion to see a real miracle. In the elements of bread and wine we experience the Real Presence of Christ with us. At the Last Supper Christ, in his own hands, takes the bread and breaks it, saying *"Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me."* And then he takes the cup and says, *"this cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."* At the most basic level the disciples feel that something is changing...something big is on the horizon. What does

Jesus mean by these words...these actions? And then he makes a remarkable statement that I can only imagine would have froze everyone in silence; *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."* This was not a night like any other night and it was only beginning.

Jesus is about to complete his work; his body will hang as a dead man, broken for the sins of mankind...and his blood will spill on the ground reaching to the lowly places of men's hearts establishing a new testament and a final sacrifice for sin. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of our redemption whereby we experience the reality of Christ in us through the renewing of our souls through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We come and consume Christ as medicine for the soul and provision for our spiritual needs. We are to receive the sacrament of his body and blood often because our continuance in sin is as an illness that needs a constant remedy. Christ is that remedy. It is an overwhelming thought...Christ, seeing our diseased souls without a cure offers us a blood transfusion...and we are washed through and cleansed by his blood!

As if those at the table were not already confused, Jesus now leaves the table to make preparations to wash the feet of those whose sins are only worthy of death. A washing before the meal would have been a normal procedure just as we might wash our hands before sitting to eat in our own homes. But here Jesus offers a second washing after the meal. The intent here bares a spiritual significance that Christ wants us to continue in. You may have noticed that foot washing is not something that the church commits too as it might seem we should. Are we negating a command or does the spiritual significance actually point to something we do perform as Christians? At the table our Lord offered up himself in the elements of bread and wine and then after removing his garments and girding himself as a lowly servant, prepares for a final spiritual act to cleanse those who are his. He washes their feet with tender care knowing that his time with them is almost over. In this final example of tender love he tells his brothers to do as he has done.

The act of washing to prevent sin is found in the Old Testament. In the book of the Prophet Isaiah we read, *"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes: cease to do evil"* (Isaiah

1:16). The act of washing each other's feet carries with it the sense of compassion and love, for though we may be in Christ, we still remain in the world and the stain of sin still finds its way within us. In this act of washing the disciples feet, Jesus is giving us an illustration that we must care for each other even after we have entered in and become one in the body of Christ. The illustration carries into our everyday lives. We wash each other's feet when we provide for our brothers needs. We wash each other's feet when we listen to a sister who pours out her sorrows. We wash the feet of the body of Christ when we build each other up in the Gospel! Foot washing meets the child of God where he walks in worldly sin and cleanses him continually keeping him unspotted from the world. Christ came to serve by taking our sins upon himself, washing us clean in a ceremonial washing that has eternal implications and we are called to continue in the same.

But this love of God, espoused in these last hours of Holy Week, does not end at the Table or in a foot basin. The love God has towards us extends into a garden where the final sacrifice for the sins of the world will be accepted and put into motion.

Jesus with his disciples enters the garden where Jesus will pray most fervently. He knows what his disciples cannot understand and only asks them to stay with him and keep watch. But they cannot even do that. Are they really that tired? Jesus finds them sleeping not once but twice. What does this have to do with our narrative? The mere mentioning of it must imply significance. Origen speaks to this puzzle in a way that I think will open our eyes to what we may not have conceived before: He says their eyes were not so much of their bodies as of their souls. Christ had not yet removed the heaviness from their eyes, because he was not yet glorified. They had not yet been given the spirit so spiritually they could not be awake. And so, Jesus does not rebuke them, but leaving them again he went away and prayed...saying the same words. Christ praying the same words in the garden, according to Origen, is an direct example by Jesus that we should not grow faint in our prayers but persist until we accomplish the will of God.

And so, for us here tonight, knowing that Christ is now glorified, we pray with the knowledge that Jesus hears our prayers and that the will of God will be done. We pray that our eyes will be opened more and more each

day and that our sanctification will bring us closer and closer into his holy presence. The Garden invitation was an intimate setting where we were given the perfect example of persistent prayer and perfect love.

Tonight we will come to the Table of the Lord as one body, to be strengthened in our hearts, our souls and our minds as the remedy for our sinful natures cures us of our burdens. Once our strength is gathered we may leave the table to assist others in need as we gird ourselves in the love of Christ and follow his example. And in the midst of it all we will have the full armor of God that will enable us to continue in fervent prayer, able to stay awake as the world around us nods off. Christ is in you and you are in the world...pray that you may be a light that beckons those in the darkness to come to Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.