

Maundy Thursday

A last meal with friends recalls our Savior's love for his disciples and foretells the completion of his mission. With a basin of water and a towel to wash feet Jesus demonstrates the ministry his followers are to continue. What better way to show the path to love than with food and service?

We call this service Commandment Thursday, *mandatum*, in Latin, using the antiphon from the verse of John 13:34, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you." The celebrating of the Jewish Passover or Seder, the New Passover meal instituted by Jesus and the washing of feet all communicate God's love for his people.

Observances gradually were added over the Church's history. Initially, there was no Eucharist celebrated before Easter Vigil until the 4th century. The Christian Passover united both a commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection and the Christian's death and rebirth through baptism. There were no Thursday or Good Friday services held in those early centuries. It was not until the early 7th century that the reenactment of John's gospel occurred, that included the Supper of the Lord, the washing of feet and the stripping and washing of altars. The latter represented the stripping of Christ's body for crucifixion and later the washing of his dead body.

Eucharistic elements in sufficient quantities was consecrated at this service and reserved for use on Good Friday. In the late medieval period a procession from the main altar to a chapel began where vigil could be made.

Queen Elizabeth in 1560 is said to have "kept her Maundy" in the great hall in Westminster by washing the feet of twenty poor women. In many places abbots washed the feet of monks and kings washed the feet of peasants on this day.

St. Paul's teaching in the epistle reminds us we are to be mindful of how we eat this supper, discerning the needs of the body of Christ. There were some that ate while others were not present or accounted for.

This would have meant the failure to wash each other as well.

Great stress therefore is put on us to care for each other as God's family. If Kings and Queens remember to wash their subjects then we too should model what Christ did for his friends. In this way Christ's sacrifice lives on in us. His passion for his people is lived out and served in carrying out this New Commandment. Have we kept our "Maundy?"