

Maundy Thursday 2026
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
1 Corinthians 11.23-26 St. John 13.1-15



DO THIS UNTIL I GET BACK...

Maundy Thursday initiates the "Paschal Triduum"...the three-day period of intense prayer and fasting...leading into Good Friday and Easter Even/Easter Day. The word "Maundy" is derived from the Latin *mandatum*, which means "commandment" or "mandate". Tonight Jesus gives us two commands.

The first command gives new meaning to the Passover Supper...Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks he said, *"This is my body, broken for you"*...then he took the cup and gave thanks again and said, *"This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you...do this as often as you get together...until I get back"*.

What we receive tonight and at every Mass is not ordinary bread and wine or mere symbols...we receive the actual Body and Blood of Christ given and shed for us. We believe this to be true and we do what Catholic Christians have always believed and done at all times and in all places.

Second Century Christian apologist and philosopher Justin Martyr stated one of the earliest Christian expressions on the Eucharist and the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament...

... "And this food is called among us Εὐχαριστία [the Eucharist] ... For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh."

The word "transmutation" can best be understood to mean "transformation". Justin taught that just as physical food metabolizes into our own bodies, the Blessed Sacrament nourishes and changes our own bodies and blood to bring us closer into union with Christ. That does not mean we become Christ...we become Christ like in love and service to others.

Justin's teaching reinforces and leaves no question to the meaning of the words in the Book of Common Prayer...

...“that we, and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made only body with with him, that he may dwell in us and we in him.”

The second command gives new meaning to the word we often use in church...LOVE! Before supper, Jesus took a bowl of water and began to wash his disciples feet. This was a profound act of humility. When Peter protested...Jesus told him he couldn't be his disciple if he wasn't allowed to wash his feet. Jesus set the pattern for his disciples and for us in defining Christian love as an ACTION! Jesus came to serve others. We must be willing to serve others regardless of the cost.

Maundy Thursday is a night of stark contrasts. White vestments are worn instead of the more somber violet. The *Gloria in excelsis*...not heard since the Last Sunday after Epiphany...adds a celebratory note to the Mass.

After we receive Holy Communion, there is a dramatic shift in the Liturgy. We process to the Altar of Repose...our Garden of Gethsemane...where the Blessed Sacrament is placed...where we are asked to watch and wait and pray.

There is a final act of preparation for what come next. We strip the Altar bare and it is washed. The Tabernacle...God's house...is open and empty. All of Jesus' disciples with the exception of John will abandon him. Will we?

The lights are turned off...we leave the church in darkness and in silence. Yes...this is a night of stark contrasts. Jesus waits...we wait.

Tonight Jesus has given us two commands. We are to celebrate Eucharist and we are to love others as much as he loves us. Neither command comes with an opt-out clause. And so, we...

...DO THIS UNTIL HE GETS BACK!

