

Sermon

Maundy Thursday, 2024

Tonight is Act I of the Triduum – the Great Three Days. Tonight we share a final meal before we begin our fast. We shared a meal a few minutes ago, and we will share a final Communion meal in just a bit. Tonight we also have the opportunity to wash feet.

The Communion meal reminds us that Jesus gave his body and blood for us. Not only for us, but for all. As Jesus said, “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself.” He sacrificed himself so that we might live. Our participation in Holy Communion is two-fold: 1) it draws us into the Body of Christ sacrificed for us; and 2) it is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

The foot washing reminds us that part of our calling is to serve others. When we wash the feet of another person, we are humbling ourselves. We bow down before them and take on a task that not many people would willingly do. To paraphrase Jesus, we are here not to be served, but to serve.

Like Communion is two-fold, so is the ceremony of foot washing. On the one hand, we serve as Jesus served. And on the other, more difficult hand, we allow someone to serve us. Sometimes this isn't a big deal – waiters, cleaners, delivery drivers, etc. But it's a different feel when it's a friend or equal who is on their knees washing our feet; see Peter, for instance. It's also hard to ask someone to do that for you; but washing feet is a gift, and it takes a level of grace to accept that gift.

So tonight we share two meals, we serve others, and we allow ourselves to be served. But that's not where or how Act I of the Triduum ends. After our second meal, the meal of Holy Communion, we will then watch as the altar is stripped. This isn't just some act of remembrance done on the Thursday before Easter. This is a formal recognition of our betrayal and desertion of Jesus.

Before you say, “I didn't, or wouldn't, betray him,” let me remind you that just a few days ago you all shouted, “Crucify him!” We are all complicit.

Between the mob mentality of crying out for a man's death, or the desire to save our own skin by saying, “I don't know the man!” we are all guilty. If we are honest, there have been many times when we have wanted Jesus out of our lives. The reasons

don't matter. At some point, we have all been Judas, or Peter, or the crowd. At some point we have all wanted to be done with him.

Tonight Jesus gives us what we want. Tonight we betray Jesus and allow him to be dragged out of our lives. Tonight we deny even knowing who Jesus is. To symbolize not having Jesus in our lives, the altar will be stripped, and anything associated with Jesus will be removed. The altar will be as bare as our lives. And when we look for Jesus, he will not be there.

As you watch the altar being stripped and laid bare, as you watch each piece of our holy sanctuary being removed, recall each time you betrayed Jesus, or each time you denied knowing him. Each betrayal, each denial, is a piece of Jesus being stripped away until there is nothing left. As Hymn 158 poignantly states: "I it was denied thee, I crucified thee."

And when it's all over, we will have left Jesus abandoned and alone, while we ourselves will leave here lonely and pitied for our selfish and cowardly actions.

May God have mercy upon us.