

Bulletin 4 – Maundy Thursday

This week we celebrate Maundy Thursday. The word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word for command, as also in mandate. On the night before Jesus died for us, he gave us two commands.

The first command was that we should “Love one another, as I have loved you”. To underline His command and to leave His disciples in no doubt the lengths that that love should take, he knelt down and washed their feet. This action at that time would have been performed by the lowest servant. Jesus showing His disciples that real love is about self-giving and takes humility. Over the centuries Popes, bishops, parish priests, kings and queens have performed this humbly act for their people to remind themselves that however grand they may feel their position is one of service. As the current pandemic continues to threaten us and our way of life, we see the selfless love with which so many people have responded to the challenge. Our admiration for all those who work on the frontline in the NHS, is huge for they, often putting themselves in danger, work tirelessly to lovingly serve those who so need their ministrations. They are joined by countless others who through acts of kindness great and small are helping to spread this love of neighbour attitude. So in the midst of worry and pain and fear so many ordinary and extra-ordinary people are obeying the Lord’s command “Love one another, as I have loved you”.

The second command he gave us on that Holy night was “do this in memory of me”. The “this” of course refers to the Eucharist Sacrifice which would be completed on Calvary the following afternoon. I want to share with you one of the most beautiful passages written by Dom Gregory Dix an Anglican Benedictine monk of the last century. Whenever I read this, I am moved for it sums up for me my ministry and the countless people I have been privileged to serve.

Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetish because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc—one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unflinchingly, across all the

parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei—the holy people of God.

Sadly, this year because of the Coronavirus I am unable to celebrate this Maundy Mass with you, but I will celebrate it for you. We can all remember to thank God for the many blessing we have received through the Mass, to promise that we will return to it as soon as possible. The first command of loving service can still be obeyed, and fittingly we can stand at our doors and clap those who are “washing the feet” of the sick and the dying.

Do remember the live streaming of mass, details on the website, Our Bishop Alan will say mass at 7.30pm in Wickford.

God Bless you all

Fr. John