

Holy Thursday 2026  
St. John 13:1-17, 31-35

Today is ... ? Well you know, today is ... um ... Thursday. In the calendar of the Church Year, we call this .... What do we call today again?

We call it “Holy” Thursday to recall all that Christ did, but honestly, when we look at the life of our Lord, we could call it any number of things.

During supper, He takes the place of the lowest servant in the house to wash the disciples’ feet. I suppose we could call this “Foot-washing Thursday.” Or much better, to help understand that Jesus is teaching us that we are to serve one another as He has served us, “Servant Thursday,” or maybe even “Humility Thursday”.

This one is my opinion but I think the best name is Holy Communion Thursday, or Eucharist Thursday, to remember the Sacrament of Holy Communion Christ instituted on this evening.

We could have just as well called it “Betrayal Thursday,” remembering how Judas betrayed Jesus, and Peter betrayed Jesus, and ... **and** ... how we daily betray Jesus by our sin.

I’m going to take a guess here and speculate that if you grew up in our neck of the woods – western North Dakota, like I did – you know today best as “Maundy Thursday”. So I ask you: Why do we call it that -- “Maundy” Thursday?

My Friends, “Maundy” is the Latin word for “commandment” or “mandate.” We get our name for this day from the new commandment, or new mandate, Jesus gave to His disciples on the fateful night in which He was betrayed, *“LOVE ONE ANOTHER: JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER”* (v. 34).

“Maundy” Thursday is a memorial to those words of Jesus.

So I ask you: What is so “new” about loving one another? At first glance, we may think that this is nothing new. The Old Testament spoke about loving one another long before Jesus ever spoke these words. It was in the Old Testament book of Leviticus we first hear the injunction: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself (19:18)*. And when Jesus said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,”* He was quoting from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy (Mt 22:37). Nothing new here!

So what is “new” about this **new** commandment? We find all the difference in that little word, “as”. “A new command I give you: *“Love one another: just **as** I have loved you, you also are to love one another”*.”

We learn how to love and we are enabled to love in Christ.

Have you heard that expression, “Actions speak louder than words”? That’s how Jesus teaches us what love is, not by many words, but by His actions. He humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin and take on human flesh. Even though He was “Very God of Very God,” He endured poverty, contempt, and persecution. He willingly allowed Himself to be taken by the hands of sinful men to be beaten, whipped, and mocked.

Only a few hours after He spoke the words of our Gospel lesson, Jesus would teach us the full extent of His love for us. He would be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, unjustly condemned, beaten, nailed to the cross. He would endure the wrath of His Father for the sin of all the world. Then, He would die, the supreme sacrifice for all that sin.

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* St. Paul wrote in our Palm Sunday Epistle (Ph 2:5). We are to love one another as Christ has loved us. But, in the death of our sin, we have no love for God and, most certainly, no love for our neighbor. So, in our

baptism, that blessed “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” God re-creates us, makes us new, in Christ. God gives us a new heart, the heart of Christ. That heart is filled with the desire to do His Father’s will. That heart is filled with love -- love for God and love for our neighbor.

We are Christ to our neighbor. As Jesus served us, we gladly and willingly serve our neighbor. Jesus taught us what it meant to serve by His actions on this night.

Let me go back to the foot-washing: Jesus and His disciples lived on this earth long before cars and paved interstate highways. When you traveled, you traveled by foot, in sandals, on dusty, dirty roads. When you entered someone’s house as their guest, almost the very first thing a host did for you was provide a servant -- often the youngest servant in the house -- to wash your feet. This was done before you reclined to eat.

When Jesus and His disciples made the long walk from Bethany to Jerusalem for the meal, they entered the upper room and -- let us not overlook this very important action of the disciples -- not one of them -- **not one** -- volunteered to wash the other’s feet. Not one of them took it upon himself to take the place of the lowest servant. They simply proceeded to recline upon the couches, in the fashion of the day, to await the meal. They expected to be served, not serve.

So, Jesus taught them. He thought of serving, not being served. He took the place of the lowest servant to wash their feet. He became their servant, when they had pridefully avoided serving. His action of washing their feet was not merely a rebuke to their sinful, selfish pride; it was an example of true love, love that is ready to render the lowliest service to others.

Let me also say this: Sometimes this time of year, foot washing ceremonies are popular. I would add “cute-sy.” But, for us, such a ceremony has little, if any, meaning.

Jesus said to His disciples and to us, *“I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you”* (v. 15). Let me be clear: Jesus is not commanding us to wash each other’s feet. Jesus is teaching us and commanding us to love one another in the same manner as He has loved us. This example of Jesus is to guide us in what we do to and for each other.

God has renewed us in Christ. Yet, our flesh clings to us, that flesh that does not love God and love neighbor. Knowing how hard it is to be love our neighbor with our thoughts, words, and deeds, Christ, on this night, gave us His own Body and Blood to eat and to drink. In this eating and drinking, Christ comes to us, to forgive our sins and strengthen us to live for Him, so that we may love one another as He has loved us.

Our post-communion prayer truly captures for what it means for us to partake of the Lord’s Body and Blood, “We implore you that of your mercy you would strengthen us through the same in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another.”

As we have received the love of Christ, let us now live in the love of Christ. As we have received forgiveness and life and salvation, let us forgive and gladly do good towards those who sin against us. For mercy we have obtained. But now, mercy is ours to show.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.