

A Homily for Maundy Thursday from Fr Allan

THE TRIDUUM, THE “THREE DAY” - beginning with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Maundy Thursday from Fr Allan

Lent will come to an end when the Mass of the Lord’s Supper begins. (I will celebrate this mass at 7.30pm). The mass marks the beginning of the Triduum - one event lasting three days. The Triduum marks the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Sometimes we use the word ‘Paschal’ to refer to these events.

We begin with Maundy Thursday. The title ‘Maundy’ comes from the Latin ‘Mandatum Novuum’ which means ‘a new commandment’. On this day Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment which is to love one another as I have loved you. Normally the Mass of the Lord’s Supper is a liturgical action - an action that involves the public worship of God. In the current pandemic this cannot happen as fully as it usually would. However, normally there are four stages - or ‘courses’ to this Last Supper Mass.

The first course involves confession and forgiveness. The mass will begin as every mass does, with a welcome and an invitation to confess our sins - as the mass at 7.30 this evening will also do. On Maundy Thursday confession and forgiveness will take on a special significance. This is because originally those who had been separated from the Eucharist were readmitted before Easter at this mass. Today this is seen as the conclusion or completion of the confession we made on Ash Wednesday. Throughout Lent we have been struggling to allow God’s life to live in us. The theory is that through prayer, fasting and reaching out to others in love we become closer to God and to one another. The distance we may now feel because of Coronavirus dissolves and we are drawn closer to God.

As we begin the Triduum we are reminded of God’s forgiveness and closeness to us all. We may not be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at this time but we will as soon as it is at all possible.

The second course of the Supper is the Washing of the Feet. We read in St John’s Gospel that at the Last Supper Jesus washed his disciples’ feet as a sign that he was their servant. In our culture we may not wash one another’s feet but the message of being at the service of one another is still relevant. In this current crisis we have so many opportunities to do this. I have been so encouraged to hear of so many creative ways to do this - from the making of face masks, making contact with people who find it difficult to get food and simply staying at home.

Originally washing feet was a part of the baptism ceremony. In this mass it becomes relevant to those preparing for baptism at Easter. It also signifies the washing away of sin.

Jesus’ washing feet was a humiliating experience. Over the course of the next twenty four hours he will be even more humiliated. Although we may not wash other people’s feet the message we take from Jesus’ actions is that humility and service are absolutely central to what it means to be a Christian.

After Jesus had washed the feet he took his seat at table and so begins the third course. The Passover will begin. When the time comes he will break bread and share the cup. He will ask that we do the same. When we do this we will celebrate a new and eternal covenant. At this

Last Supper the breaking of the bread was a foreshadowing of the breaking of his own body but it was also a promise of the meal we will share in the life to come. He really is present among us. He brings us together even though we may feel very distant from one another at this time. In doing as he commanded he makes us a force that can change the world.

After the meal Jesus goes off to pray. He will suffer alone. Although his closest friends go with him they are apart. This time apart marks the fourth course. In the usual Mass of the Lord's Supper this prayer apart is usually marked by the stripping of the altar and the procession to the altar of repose. Neither will take place this year. However, we can still be one with Jesus in our prayer and in our isolation.

When this mass is over we will feel that there is unfinished business. It won't feel finished and we may not feel satisfied. This is how it should be. We have two more days to go and so, for now, we pray quietly, reflecting on what we have seen and heard, preparing for the saving events that are to come and have already happened!