



Holy Thursday Message

My Dear Friends,

Tonight begins the 3 day celebration and remembrance of our Lord's passion and glorious resurrection. It is known, depending upon the denominational tradition, as the Triduum, the Paschal Triduum, the Holy Triduum, or the Easter Triduum. The word, pronounced TRIH-du-um, is Latin for 3 days of prayer.

This evening marks the summit of the entire church year, beginning tonight after sundown with what we call Holy, or Maundy Thursday. *Maundy* is also a Latin word meaning mandatum, or command. Just what was mandated on this night, and why is it so important for us, especially during this pandemic?

Tonight is what most theologians consider to be the holiest night of the entire year. No other night can compare, for it is unlike any other night. Historically, spiritually, sacramentally, theologically, there is no night so completely full of Grace, so mystically profound, so replete in religious magnitude. It asks of us, requires of us, demands us to draw near and take notice. Perhaps in this particular year we can do so with our utmost and undivided attention.

Tonight would be the very last night Jesus would spend alive upon this earth. It would be the very last holiday gathering He would partake in, the Passover. It would be the very last meal He would share with His friends, the last song He would sing, His last farewells, teachings, and instructions.

During this Last Supper, Jesus would "Rise from the table and wash the feet of His disciples, telling them that they too must now wash one another's feet." *John 13: 1-11*
This stunning act of Christ's humility was, and remains, a mandate for us to selflessly and sacrificially serve one another. He told us that, "He came to serve, not to be served."
Matthew 20:28

As our nation and world are reeling with sickness, fear, and uncertainty, there is no greater need than to serve one another. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly, I say to you, as you do to the least of these my brothers, you do it unto me." *Matthew 25: 35-40*

I received a message this morning from my friend Rev. John Samaan, president and CEO of the Boston Rescue Mission, thanking us at Grace Church for our 20 years of support, and to inform me that the news is confirmed; hundreds of homeless men and women in our area have tested positive for COVID-19. One in three of both guests and staff at the mission have verified cases of the novel corona virus.

Never before has there been such a need for God's mercy and compassion. Jesus showed us by example how to serve one another, may we do so humbly and prayerfully with love.

It was on this Holy Thursday night, during the annual Seder which commemorated the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery and oppression, that the shed blood of a spotless lamb was marked upon door lintels to protect the faithful from the final plague; the angel of death.

Jesus would establish the New and Everlasting covenant with all mankind. Here He would institute the sacrament of the Eucharist, (remember the translation from Greek, *Eucharist* means Thanksgiving). The Last supper would become the Lord's Supper, a mandate, "Take this, all of you and eat, for this is my body which will be given up for all

of you. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He said Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for all ,for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, in remembrance of Me until I come again.” *Matthew 26: 26-29*

The isolation incurred by this pandemic prevents us from receiving Holy Communion in the physical sense in the elements of bread and wine, a most difficult reality. Yet we are never separated from our Lord, and reminded of the communion of the saints.

Maybe NOT being able to partake of the spiritual food of the Eucharist will bring us to a greater awareness and appreciation of its life giving, soul nurturing, spiritual benefits. As we've all heard, "You don't know what you've got til it's gone".

Jesus would establish the priesthood on this Holy Thursday night. Tonight is the first time in history the Chrism Mass will not occur. This is the annual and required renewal of baptismal promises and priestly vows taken by clergy worldwide. It includes Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. Please pray for all clergy everywhere.

On this Holy Thursday night, Jesus would institute yet another radical and revolutionary precept, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you." *John 13:34* Jesus would raise the definition of love to a new and higher standard, mandating us to love even the unlovable and those who despise us, even our enemies!

On this Holy Thursday night after the dinner we read, "Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to His disciples, sit here while I go over there to pray." *Matthew 26:36* Isolated and alone, Jesus would agonize and lament with great sorrow and heaviness of heart, asking His friends to watch and pray. They failed Him and fell asleep. Can we watch and pray for just one hour?

On this Holy Thursday night, the quiet prayerful solitude of the garden would suddenly be shattered with the clamor of approaching soldiers wielding sword and spear. Judas led them to Him and would offer Him up, betraying Him "with a kiss". They would arrest Him, shackle Him, drag Him off to face false witnesses, unjust condemnation, and brutal painful beatings leading up to His execution on Friday. His beloved disciples would flee. His closest, Peter, would deny he ever heard of Jesus; not once, but three times. In the darkness of night, all this would occur. God would allow it all. He did it all for us, ALL of us!

What then can we do for Him? On this Maundy Thursday, let's keep His mandatum. Serve one another, forgive those who trespass against us, love one another, fear not, keep the faith; It's not the end of the story.

Blessings,

Fr. Peter

Please note, the remainder of Holy Week services will be as follows:

- Good Friday Service: YouTube Livestream 12:00pm
- Easter Sunday Mass: YouTube Livestream 10:00am

Please visit the Grace Church Website for more information:

<https://www.gracechurchofdover.com/events>