

Maundy Thursday

Colour Purple (sometimes Red in an Orthodox church)

Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday is the day in Holy Week when the Christian Church remembers what Jesus did at his Last Supper with his disciples. Knowing he was to die soon he has a last meal with his friends, during which he tells them that he knows he has been betrayed to the authorities (by Judas Iscariot). He undertakes a number of symbolic actions, including washing his friends' feet as a servant would do and asking them always to do the same for each other. Jesus also takes the bread and wine which are part of the Jewish Passover meal and tells the disciples to understand them as his Body and his Blood, his physical body which will be crucified. In instituting the Eucharist in this way, he tells the disciples to make their acts of eating and drinking together into memorials of his presence among them. By extension this makes it possible for Christians to re-enact the meal in the same way and so bring Jesus into the midst of each Eucharistic celebration. How this happens is understood differently by different Christian denominations.

On this day, the foot washing may be enacted with the priest or minister washing the feet of members of the congregation. The Last Supper is commemorated and in many churches the church is afterwards stripped of altar linen and any objects on the altar, so that the church is bare for Good Friday. In many churches, the reserved, or left over consecrated bread and wine is taken away from the place where it is kept and the receptacle left open. The reserved bread is taken in procession to an 'altar of repose' where it is kept for Good Friday.

Some churches keep a time of silence or watching before the altar (a vigil) afterwards to remember how after the Supper Jesus went to Gethsemane and prayed, asking his disciples to stay awake and pray with him. In a church where the vigil takes place after the service, silence needs to be observed. It is usually up to you if you stay to pray or leave.



[Simon Ushakov Last Supper 1685](#)

Exodus 12.1-4[5-10], 11-14

The First Passover Instituted

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.[Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of

Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.] This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

What's going on?

This story sets the context for what happened at the Last Supper. The people of Israel were captive in Egypt when God told them that death was coming to the land. That death would strike down humans and animals and there would be a disaster. But God told his faithful people that there was a way in which they could be spared and that was to make a sacrifice of an unspoiled lamb and put its blood on the doorframe of their houses. The blood would be a signal for death to 'pass over' their homes and spare them. The sacrificed animal would be cooked and eaten in a particular way with bread and herbs and in a state of readiness for departure. God also told his people to continue to do this in remembrance that the Lord saves and delivers. This then is the institution of the Jewish festival of Passover, the festival which Jesus commemorated with his friends at the Last Supper.

Psalm 116

Thanksgiving for Recovery from Illness

**I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.**

**I kept my faith, even when I said,
'I am greatly afflicted';**

**I said in my consternation,
'Everyone is a liar.'**

**What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?**

**I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,**

**I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.**

**Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.**

O LORD, I am your servant;

I am your servant, the child of your serving-maid.

You have loosed my bonds.

**I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.**

What's going on?

This psalm points us to God's faithfulness and desire to save. It also directly reminds us of what we see happening at the Last Supper when Jesus raised the cup of wine and renamed it as his blood poured out to save human beings 'a new covenant'. Jesus is, like the psalmist here, a servant who makes this clear by washing the disciples' feet. He is too, the thanksgiving sacrifice, offered up so that everyone can be free from all which separates us from God.

1 Corinthians 11.23-26

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

What's going on?

St Paul explains what we are to understand by Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper. Jesus broke the bread and offered the wine as was traditional for Passover, but then he went on to give his friends a new ritual, one which would enable them to remember him and keep him with them. He breaks the bread and says that this is his body, broken in death; the wine is his blood, poured out in death. By this means whenever they eat and drink together, they will not forget the sacrifice he made of his life and what it meant for the salvation of human beings.

John 13.1-17,31b-35

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe

them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.'

The New Commandment

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

What's going on?

This story from St John's gospel focuses on another part of the Last Supper. Jesus washes his disciples feet, astonishing and unnerving them. This was a servant's nasty job. Peter remonstrates, but Jesus tells him that doing the nasty jobs to care for others is a demonstration of care and friendship for others and that all the disciples should love and take care of one another.

Once Peter understands this he is enthusiastic for a way of living in community in which everyone helps and cares for everyone else. This is reinforced at the end of the passage when Jesus tells his disciples that he is going from them and without him they must live by a new command, that they love one another. This mutual care, respect, humility and love in community should henceforth be a hallmark of Christian living and discipleship.