

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The final days leading up to Easter are known as Passiontide. They represent the closing moments of the great drama that has led Christ and His followers to the inevitability of that first Good Friday and the anticipation of its subsequent Easter. There is both a foreboding and yet also a hope set within the sequence of events, each with its own edge on the principal storyline.

In our prayers, we witness to this unfolding drama – and use our imagination to take us back to that scene in first-century Palestine where Christ, having come to the end of His earthly teaching, prepares for the transition to a greater depth and height and wonder. And with it, comes a promise – that we too, facing potentially cataclysmic happenings in our own time, may pass through such trauma and reach a more hopeful future. As the virus currently takes hold within society, we are all-too-aware of its impending sense of 'Good Friday' – may our faith ensure that 'Easter Day' will indeed follow.

And, in those same prayers, we pause. We pause as Jesus and the disciples did on that fateful Thursday; pause to take food and drink. A normal practice – and yet on this occasion, far from normal. Ordinary food and drink no doubt – but words from Christ which would have transformed the thinking of his friends; words which implanted within them a foresight of what is to be: "take eat, take drink, take this is memory of me; when I am no longer with you, so might you discover me close to you." Imagery that perhaps seems confused. Imagery that was to be revelatory.

On this day, we would have gathered. We would have joined in celebration of this meal. We would have given thanks for the powerful imagery contained within the Sacrament of the Church. But we cannot. The viral forces will not allow such – but they cannot prevent our prayers, so feel free to follow this worship through – and as you do, transport yourself to a time and place where we will once again give thanks for the great richness of the Eucharist in our lives.

This short liturgy is designed to be used in your own homes – and we hope that it will be of use to you at this time. You can share it with others. You can sit by yourself, and ponder its words. You can light a candle to burn as you follow it. You can certainly join in with the exercise. However you use it, pause and remember the rest of our Church community at this time – and look forward to a time of celebration when we will indeed be together again.

During it, you have opportunity to replicate the Communion of the Church in a moment of sharing. You will need some food and drink to symbolise the sharing of such in what is sometimes known as an Agape meal, a term that dates from early times (before the clear establishment of a more sacred notion of the now-familiar Eucharistic ceremony), used as it was to describe a gathering together of friends and family during which the memory of Jesus sharing the same would be invoked in some informal yet prayerful way. The term 'agape' is, inevitably, open to personal interpretation.

A LITURGY FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY follows ...

A LITURGY FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY

'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.'
(John 13:34)

A Reflective Moment

Have mercy on me, O God,
in your great goodness;
according to the abundance of your compassion
blot out my offences.

Against you only have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight.

Purge me from my sin and I shall be clean;
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

A Song of Solomon

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;

For love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave;
its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can the floods drown it.

If all the wealth of our house were offered for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

A Word of Scripture

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

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 this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

A Song of Jonah

I called to you, O God, out of my distress
and you answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.

You cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me,
all your waves and billows passed over me.

Then I said, I am driven away from your sight;
how shall I ever look again upon your holy temple?

The waters closed in over me,
the deep was round about me;
weeds were wrapped around my head
at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever,
yet you brought up my life from the depths, O God.

As my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, O God,
and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

With the voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay;
deliverance belongs to the Lord!

A Quiet Moment ...

... as you offer your own thoughts and prayers.

You may wish to place in front of you a small token of remembrance for this day:

*a piece of bread or cracker, and a glass of wine (or similar) –
as you look upon it, so you might wish to reflect on its symbolism,
and perhaps join Christ in His Supper,
using these words:*

Having loved his own who were in the world,
he loved them to the end;
and on the night before he suffered,
sitting at table with his disciples,
he instituted the holy mysteries,
that we, redeemed by his death
and restored to life by his resurrection,
might be partakers of his divine nature

*... and now, feel free to both eat and drink,
in recognition of the moment*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen

A Prayer for Maundy Thursday

Lord Jesus Christ,
you said to your apostles,
'I leave you peace, my peace I give you.'
Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church,
and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom,
where you live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen

May Christ, who bore our sins on the cross,
set us free to serve him with joy.
So, let us bless the Lord!