

CELEBRATING MAUNDY THURSDAY AT HOME

Before you begin your meal.

 Light a candle so everyone knows this isn't just any family meal. Something special and holy is about to happen.

Read aloud:

Did you know Jesus' last night with his friends was spent in a place called the Upper Room? That's where they gathered around a table for their meal. They thought it was going to be a meal just like so many other meals they had shared with Jesus, but this one turned out to be unlike any meal they had ever known.

You may have seen pictures of the Last Supper where Jesus and the disciples are sitting in chairs, the way we do it. But actually, they reclined on cushions at a table on the floor. It was a "laid back" occasion.

There were two really important things that happened at this meal. It was the first time Jesus took the bread and wine, blessed them, and said, "This is my body" and "This is my blood." Every time we celebrate communion, we're remembering this night when Jesus shared himself with his disciples around the table. He's promised that he continues to come to us, even today, in the bread and wine.

Christians celebrate Holy Communion when the community is together. The meal isn't just about the bread and wine; it's about receiving this gift from one another and with one another. During our love-distancing these days (a friend has renamed social-distancing love-distancing, and I really like that), we're fasting from Holy Communion, and look forward to the day when we'll all gather again to receive our living Lord who gives himself to us in this amazing way.

But before Jesus even got to the part where he gave his disciples Holy Communion for the first time, he did something to show them how much he loved them. He knelt before them and washed their feet. This was his way of showing them that, like him, they need to love and serve one another in humility. He gave them a new commandment, that they love one another as he loved them. In fact, the word *Maundy* means *commandment*.

Before you begin your meal together, read John 13:3-17, 34-35. You can read it from your Bible, or here:

³ Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. ⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

⁸ "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me."

⁹ Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

¹⁰ Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean."

¹² After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. ¹⁴ If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. ¹⁶ I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

³⁴ "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

➡ If you're adventurous (and I hope you are), and you have someone else living with you, pour some water in a basin, get out some towels and wash one another's feet. Be careful, though. This experience might transform you!

Before you start eating, here's a table prayer you might use:

Lord, Jesus, on this holy night you washed the feet of your friends, and you shared your last meal with them. Bless this meal that we share tonight. Help us to remember that whenever we eat, you are here at the table with us, teaching us to love one another the way you have loved us. Amen.

Enjoy your meal!

➡ As you eat together, think about some of the special meals that you have shared with the people you love. What made them memorable? How is this like or different than Holy Communion? What do you miss about taking Holy Communion in this time when we are not receiving it?

After eating.

Read aloud:

When we come together to worship in our church building on Maundy Thursday, we end our time together with the stripping of the altar. As we hear a Psalm sung or said, all the sacred ornaments are removed: candles, bible, altar book, communion ware, linens and paraments. When it is finished, the altar is completely bare. It reminds us of the bareness of life without the hope of Christ that we have through his resurrection.

To remember this tradition, read Psalm 22. You get the gist of it from verses 1-5, but if you're up for the full experience, read the whole thing. I hope you'll notice how this Psalm foreshadows the death of Jesus on the cross and leads us into the sorrow of Good Friday. You can read it from your Bible or right here:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

⁶ *But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.*

⁷ *All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;*

⁸ *“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”*

⁹ *Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.*

¹⁰ *On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.*

¹¹ *Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*

¹² *Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

¹³ *they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*

¹⁵ *my mouth^[a] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

¹⁶ *For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;^[b]*

¹⁷ *I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;*

- ¹⁸ they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- ¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life^[c] from the power of the dog!
- ²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued^[d] me.
- ²² I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;^[e]
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- ²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,^[f]
but heard when I^[g] cried to him.
- ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- ²⁶ The poor^[h] shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.^[i]
- ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ To him,^[j] indeed, shall all who sleep in^[k] the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.^[l]
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
- ³¹ and^[m] proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.



You can do a “stripping of the altar” in your own home.

- Gather any faith related items you may have in your house -- icons, statues, religious art and symbols that can be easily removed. Pack them away somewhere, in a storage bin or a bag. (You might also cover any large items with a cloth.)
- Remove all items from your dining table so it’s completely empty and thoroughly wash it so it is both cleared and cleaned.
- Leave your table bare until Easter morning.

Parents: on Saturday night when everyone has gone to bed, unpack and uncover the religious items and decorate your dining room table with Easter joy so your family can awaken to a day of celebration!

God’s blessings to all of you as you discover new ways of worshiping God through these days of distancing. Even where two or three are not gathered together, I can assure you that Jesus is in the midst of us!

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