

HOLY THURSDAY - 2008
“Do this in memory of me.”

Tonight is about the New Commandment, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus knew that how we lived this commandment would become the ultimate test of our discipleship. *“By this will all people know that you are my disciples, your love for one another.”* And what this love would look like would be critical. It had to be more than feeling good about ourselves, or our having a sense of belonging to God, or even a sense of inner well being that comes from knowing we are not bad people. That may all be good, but it is not enough. None of that really has much to do with keeping the New Commandment that Jesus gave us.

The kind of love that Jesus had in mind for us is almost shocking. It looked like a man of great dignity, but on his knees before going on. And that dignified man, who had extraordinary powers, was on his knees to wash their feet. The love that Jesus was counting on his disciples to show to the world was the love of service, of self-giving, of emptying oneself for the sake of others.

“If I washed your feet – I who am teacher and Lord – then you must wash each other’s feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do.”

It sounds so simple, but we know it isn’t. That is why Jesus gave us another commandment that night. In fact, it was this other commandment that Jesus gave, I believe, that has kept the first one before our eyes as a Church. Even when we haven’t loved as we have been called to love, we’ve never forgotten that call to self-giving love, thanks to that other commandment Jesus gave us that night as he gathered to share this extraordinary meal with his disciples.

And that other commandment? The one we don't think about even as a commandment, ironically, has been obeyed faithfully throughout the centuries.

*Jesus took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. **Do this in remembrance of me.**" In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. **Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.**"*

"Do this. . . ." As one spiritual writer put it:

"Has ever a commandment been so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly from every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done; in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age, and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in caves and dens of the earth. People have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting for an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to superstition because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Lisa; for the settlement of a strike; for a son, for a barren woman, for a prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach of Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonization of S. Joan of Arc. One could

*fill many pages with the reasons why people have **done this**, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the priests have done this just to make holy, the common people of God.”*

“Do this!” It is as if Jesus is saying to us each time we do, “Take the bread, break it, offer it, receive me as food. Take the cup, bless it, pour it out in offering on the cross of your altar, and then drink of me. It is the new covenant in my blood. Whatever your state in life, whatever threshold you may be on, whatever the joy you may be experiencing or cross you may be carrying, I want you to renew your commitment to the covenant of love I entered into with you. Recommit yourself to live the New Commandment of loving service as a sign of this covenant. It matters not whether you are a king at coronation time, or a peasant bringing your child for baptism. You are to live the Commandment of service with your people and with your child. When you are laying your loved one to rest, **“Do this!”** It will remind you of the value I have put on your loved one’s life. When you are on vacation enjoying the world, meeting new people, I want you to remember it is all gift, and that no one is a stranger to me. When you hear of war and rumors of war, I want you to **“Do this!”** It will remind you I died for all, so that peace would be possible. **“Do this!”** at your celebrations. **“Do this!”** in ordinary time. I am always here to nourish, guide and give you life. Why? Because I want you to nourish, guide and give life to others through your loving service.”

Without the Eucharist, we would have lost our way long ago. We could have even lost the call of the gospel. We would have grown deaf to the call to love. What a glorious Feast we celebrate tonight, Holy Thursday.

On this night Jesus gave us two great commandments: To love one another as Jesus loves us . . . in the Eucharist.