

Maundy Thursday 2010 Broxbourne

Before Jesus washed the disciples' feet they had been arguing about their social status in heaven. The foot-washing was to teach them humility and service. The foot-washing showed to the disciples that the man in high office - even the Son of God was the servant of all.

In this humble act, we see something of Jesus' awareness of what is to come. For the past six months or so, he has been warning the disciples that his 'hour' is coming. It has now come. But, instead of dwelling on his own agony, he concentrates on preparing his friends for the job they will have to do. Though he had prepared the disciples for a major event in store, he had not dwelt on the cross.

He emphasizes it now - but they don't understand. From this point on, we can sense an estrangement: the disciples are suddenly unsure of their Lord, of themselves, of their position. They don't understand the foot-washing. They sense something awful is about to happen. Their time of testing has begun.

And now Jesus opens his heart to them and time and again Jesus warns of his cross - but never without also foretelling his resurrection.

The washing of the master's feet was a menial task not required of the Jewish slave, but of the slaves of other nationalities. We live in a world where convention, despite free thinking and a lot of licence, still rules society to a large extent. According to the gospels, Jesus was not overburdened by convention - and nowhere more so than in the upper room that night. The disciples were embarrassed. Peter, as usual, protested, only to call upon him the rebuke: 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me'.

Today, we too need to let Jesus make close contact with us. We need the contact, and the cleansing it brings. We may be Christians, but there is no automatic switching on of God's power in us, or his love for us: we can block the power, and negate the love, by refusing to let him come close.

By the washing, Peter and the rest would be completely cleansed and prepared for their mission.

But the ministry of Jesus on that evening only began with the washing of feet.

It was the feast of the Passover remembering the time when God saved his people and brought them out of Egypt. And this last supper was all about God saving mankind through the death of Jesus.

And it was at this supper that Jesus took bread - almost certainly the unleavened bread of the Passover . And he blessed it and gave it to his disciples saying that the bread was to remind them of his body which was to be broken for them and for all mankind.

He then took the cup of wine and gave it to them reminding them that it represented his blood that would be shed for them and for all people.

And then he added these words - “do this in remembrance of me.”

So in the Communion service we remember that sacrifice made once for all, so that no more sacrifices needed to be made and that forgiveness is ours for the asking.

My final point is to draw your attention to some words that we use in the Eucharistic prayer - the prayer which consecrates the bread and the wine.

In a few minutes in the prayer of Thanksgiving we shall hear words something like these:

“with angels and archangels
and all the powers of heaven
we proclaim your great and glorious name”

The wonderful thing with the Communion service is that we when we come to the altar we join the angels and the whole company of heaven remembering that this includes all those loved ones who have gone before. Heaven and earth meet at the altar rail.

And so as we celebrate the last supper and the first communion service we remember the humility of Jesus that should be the guide to our Christian behaviour

We remember the sacrifice of Jesus as he gave his body and blood for us all

And that we join the whole company of heaven as we take communion together. And this is why Maundy Thursday is so special to Christians everywhere.

Amen.