

Exodus 12: 1-4 (5-10), 11-14  
Psalm 116: 1, 10-17  
I Corinthians 11: 23-26  
St. John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday 2024.

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“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.”

St. John 13: 34a

An anthropologist once wrote that Innu people in the Canadian North had 52 different words for snow... It turns out that he was a little over-zealous – there are 12 different unique words for snow in the northern Canadian region... Still, that’s quite a lot! (I usually just think of snow as “wet,” “dry,” or “crunchy...”) But we can see that all languages and cultures have words that don’t always work, when translated into other languages, like English...

The same is true for the word “love...” In English, there used to be the word “charity,” but that is mostly falling into disuse, unless we talk about “charitable tax receipts”... In the Greek language, however (the language in which the New Testament was originally written), there are 4 different words for “love” – *eros* for sexual intimacy (from which we get the English word “erotic”); *philia* (the kind of loyalty-love which can be experienced between 2 close friends); *storgé* (the love among family members); and lastly, what was thought to be the highest form of love, *agape* – the divine love between God and his people... *Agape*...

The early Church would typically have a meal when the Christians gathered together, commonly called an *agape* meal. The Eucharist – Communion – would be shared together, generally at the conclusion of the meal...

St. Paul had to give directions about fair sharing within the community for the *agape* meal: “When the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk... So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home...”

So, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, or the Mass, was offered in the context of a larger meal – just as the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper in the context of the Jewish Passover meal... It wasn’t until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the common *agape* meal practice died out altogether... Let’s note, however, that the crux of the shared meal was to be marked with divine love, and transformed human love, in the local worshipping community...

As we share Holy Communion together, it’s appropriate for us to recall the depth and breadth and height of God’s love for us... Jesus Christ died in our place. God’s love for us is so great, Jesus Christ died for every single one of us!... In return, we are to learn to love him back with all our being – our hearts and souls and minds and strength!...

We offer our sacrifice of love and praise *in return*, not as servants to a distant Master whom we serve because we must, nor out of fear and anxiety – but by divine love, the love of the Spirit, bubbling up to overflowing...

Let's note, the love which is shown in this eucharistic meal is not only between each individual and *God*... It is also the love we show among ourselves in the parish community... The Lord Jesus shocked his friends as he instituted the Sacrament, by washing their feet the way a servant would, in that ancient culture... For those of us who choose, we will be re-enacting that action of serving one another, by washing one another's feet, tonight... When sharing Communion together, we experience together God's divine love within the context of the community...

We respond to God's love for us, his *agape*, by learning to love him back. This means honouring what he has done for us, and sharing in the abiding grace of his presence, his Body and Blood, shared by faith... As well, Communion is also about belonging together as a new spiritual family – the worldwide family of brothers and sisters in the community of the Church...

On the night he instituted this meal we celebrate – the night of his betrayal – Jesus said to his friends,

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.'

May it always be so among us. Alleluia. Amen.