



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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Maundy Thursday Homily  
John 13:1-17, 34-35 and Mark 14:12-26  
April 1, 2021

## “Naked and Ashamed...Once More”

It is thought that the origins and significance of this Holy Day are in the Exodus from Egypt.

To the extent that our focus remains on the blessed sacrament of Holy Communion, our Lord's “last supper” that is true. What Jesus first did to and then through the meal he shared with his disciples “on the night he was betrayed”, Mark tells us, was done on the first night of the Jewish feast of Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, “*when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb.*”

This Jewish feast lasted 8 days according to Exodus – from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. The lamb was eaten on the first day since it was, literally the “last supper” Moses and the people would consume before they fled for their lives. The unleavened bread hastily made would be their “to go meal” eaten as they fled. The connection between God's saving action through lamb's blood smeared on doorframes in Egypt and this holy night of ours – when we remember that Jesus replaced symbolic blood with his own, is unmistakable. Yet this night's origins go even deeper.

For that we turn to our first reading tonight – from John 13. What Jesus did as the Passover meal was being consumed was both stunning and mysterious to his disciples. Washing feet was a custom offered by hosts of meals to their guests. If the host had a servant, it would have been their job to perform – a menial and unpleasant task, but part of the job description. If the householder did not, water would have been put out and it may have been “*every man to himself*”.

Whether by accident or design, nobody tended to this before the meal started so John tells us that during the meal Jesus arose and began to wash his disciples. One cannot overstate the awkwardness of this – on one hand it could have been interpreted as Jesus' concern at not being offered water and washing upon arrival – this would have been directed at the host – a sort of “*alright then, I'll do it myself*” expression of displeasure. But we now know Jesus had another motivation – an ancient one dating from long before the Exodus and its blood deliverance.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, flush with sin, were also flush with worry – one might infer they were ashamed as well as afraid that their “nakedness” would be discovered by God and dealt with accordingly. The sin of Adam and Eve was their wanting to be gods apart from God, to serve themselves and therefore not God. It is of no little significance then, that John tells us Jesus “stripped” himself – (meaning he removed his outer clothing, leaving him only clad in an undergarment). Nakedness in the bible, particularly in Genesis, is not good – shame is not good – in God's economy, it just won't do. How then

to undue it? Genesis 3 says God “*fashioned clothes for the man and covered him.*” God didn’t (and wouldn’t) let them die naked and ashamed or afraid.

These were clothes made of natural things however – not made to last, grace in the form of patience. Our Lord Jesus, ‘*in the night he was betrayed*’ – a phrase reminiscent of when Adam and Eve “*betrayed God*”, became the naked one in order to clothe in forgiveness ashamed or afraid ones. On this holy night, the patience of God became forgiveness. Jesus in kneeling before dirty feet, served God by serving sinners God still so dearly loved. The Son of God was God in humble obedience – not for his own sake, but yours.

The kindness of someone can be one of the hardest things for a person to accept. It’s humbling, and the recipient often fumbles through thoughts of now being obligated to act in like manner. Small wonder that on his holy night, Peter protested. But if you refuse even small graces, what will become of you when you need large ones? If Peter would have no part in the washing of his feet, how could he receive the grace of the cross?

Thus, two commands shape this Holy Night. First to eat the bread and wine of our Lord’s body. Luther said in his Small Catechism that whoever believes the words “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*” have what they say – for God chooses and does truly forgive this way.

Then the command to love one another as we have been loved. Of the two, this may be the harder, for unlike the command in the sacrament, this command does engage us. Love is active, sacrificial, and the command our Lord gave his church may well require more reliance on God than the command to take forgiveness from his hands and side. This command means we bring forgiveness into every sphere of our lives, not just carry it around in us. This command tells our bodies to engage in a “*think of others before yourself*” “love to our families, to our workplaces, to our schools, and yes, even to our enemies.

On this Holy Night, we remember that God has commanded us to live this way, but his commands are not burdensome, and with each he promises the grace to do them.