

Sermon Maundy Thursday 2020

How true it is that a moment of crisis helps us to see what is truly important. How true it is that our frailty, our finitude, our mortality throws up in sharp relief our priorities. How true it is that when disaster, disruption and disorder impact our lives, we need to work out – and pretty quickly – what is truly important. At the start of this year, who could have predicted the place we now find ourselves? Crisis, frailty, disaster, disruption and disorder now impacts almost every single community at different levels across the globe. Whether a worker, parent, a student, retired, rich, poor, young, old we have all had to reevaluate our lives. We have had to *sharpen our focus* and work out what is important, to let go of the incidental, and to hold lightly to the unimportant.

As for us, so for our Lord Christ. On the night of his Last Supper, and his agonised prayer in the garden, the storm clouds had gathered and were about to break; the crowd in Jerusalem were restless because of the festival; the authorities were pushing toward an inevitable and bloody conclusion; and our Lord faced his end. The focus sharpened. Priorities were ordered. Everything else gave way - the teaching, the healing, and all the rest. And our Lord proposes a last will and testament: *on the night he was betrayed, took bread...do this in remembrance of me. And, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end...rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel...and began to wash his disciples' feet. Jesus takes bread and wine, a bowl of water and a towel: do this in remembrance of me; you also should do as I have done to you.*

When all else falls away, when the spotlight rests only on what is truly essential, the simple kernel of what *must be* remembered, what *must be* enacted if love of him means anything, these two remain: *do this; do as I have done*. Our Lord leaves *these* as his last will and testament. If love of him means anything, *we will take them seriously*.

If love of him means anything, then we will love the Eucharist, not only the living remembrance of him, but his own abiding gift of himself. Might it be that before now we have allowed hearts to grow cold in the love of our Lord in the Eucharist? Might it be that we have become casual in our attendance, half-hearted in our devotion? Might it be that we have become careless when approaching the altar, making no effort at preparation and no attempt at thanksgiving. Might it be that we have allowed ourselves to become complacent to the absolute central importance it ought to have in our lives?

If so, then accept the discipline of this enforced fast! While all of us are deprived of sharing at the altar, then may this be the time when our hearts are once more enkindled with the fire of love. May this be the time when our longing for the Eucharist grows. Let us feel acutely how we miss it. Let this extended fast make us hungry for the Eucharist! This can be a time of grace! A grace when we can grow in love for Christ's supreme gift! And knowing the pain of missing it, we promise never to approach it casually, indifferently, complacently again.

If love of Christ means anything then we will accept his last gift to us in the Eucharist. We will heed his words: *do this!* But it will also mean love of neighbour, of each other, of the church! *I leave this for you as an example.* This celebration tonight, then, highlights for us believers, scattered throughout the world, *the two aspects* of communion Christ desires to be at the heart of our shared life: communion with him and communion with each other. Communion with Christ celebrated in the Eucharist only fulfilled when there is likewise communion with each other. In time of isolation and separation, my! how we must be creative in this! The Christian *cannot* live their life in isolation. When fear, anxiety, uncertainty, disruption surrounds us, the instinct is to succumb and to retreat. But small tokens of love, care, concern, fellowship remain not only possible, they remain essential! In Christian life it is very easy to expect others to do the caring, others to look after the practical matters, someone else to attend to the details, someone else to provide out their means. Our Lord Christ doesn't see it that way! *You also should do as I have done to you.* Before now, might we have become casual, indifferent, complacent to Christ present in his living body the church and present in the distressing disguise of the poor? Again, then might this be the time we reawaken to heed Christ's own solemn command: *do as I have done.*

On this night, our Lord Christ institutes the Eucharist and washes feet. And he proposes *these* as his last will and testament. In them we are shown what is central and essential: communion with him and with each other. Dear brothers and sisters, when all else falls away, when we are given this chance to see what truly matters, to reorder our priorities, accept the grace of this time. In the darkness, in the waiting, in our Gethsemane, let our longing grow, let our heart-felt desire for communion grow, with Christ in the Eucharist, and with each other. Having lost for a little while, let this be the time when our hearts are once more enkindled with the fire of love. Amen.