

Maundy Thursday evening St M 28 03 24

This morning many of the clergy and Licenced lay ministers in diocese across the country gathered in their local cathedral to renew their commitment to the ministry to which God has called them. During the service the oils were brought forward to the bishop to be blessed. The Oil of the catechumens which we use at Baptism the moment which recognises publicly the beginning of our Christian journey as a member of God's family the church. Then the oil of Chrism used to anoint the candidates at confirmation and ordination and for anointing the Monarch at the coronation.

The third oil is for the anointing of the sick and dying.

As we draw to the end of the penitential season of Lent and we leave Palm Sunday behind us, the events of Christ's passion unfold, and we draw ever closer to Calvary, our attention is increasingly drawn to the truth

that Jesus' vocation to do the Fathers will, leads to death on the cross.

This evening, we gather to remember the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. It was not an impromptu event it was carefully prepared-for. The Gospels give clear evidence that Jesus saw to all the details. it was also a acknowledgement that Jesus was preparing for the fulfilment of his destiny.

Luke's narrative *tells us Jesus said "I have longed and longed so deeply to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."* (Luke 22:15)

But while the synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus and the disciples gathered to share the Passover meal with all its echoes of the Old Testament narrative of the Israelite slaves' exodus from Egypt. St John's account places the emphasis on Jesus' act of humility and service. The meal went beyond its ancient significance and makes a new thing of it.

Jesus knew His time was near. He and His disciples gathered together for a familiar meal but on this occasion they find that things are not the same as usual and the disciples begin to feel uncomfortable as Jesus gets up from table and strips himself of his outer garments and kneels before each of them in turn and washes their feet.

Next time we hear of Jesus stripped of his clothes he is standing at the foot of the cross while soldiers tear the cloths off him.

But for the moment there are no soldiers just the master voluntarily taking on the role of a lowly servant and gently cleansing his follower's dirty smelly feet.

It is an act of love and humility. An action which illustrates in a very practical way His final command to love one another. But again this is different, for the charge is qualified with the words to "love as I have loved you."

The new commandment which Jesus gives them in his final discourse before going to fulfil his destiny, is not

simply about dos and don'ts and while it is often advocated that one should do unto others as you would have them do to you There is a stipulation above and beyond this that we love one another as Christ loves us. It is about self-effacing, self-giving love. The ultimate love of the God who sent his only Son to die for us. It directs that we lay aside status and rank and prestige and privilege to follow a life of loving service. This is a self-sacrificing unconditional love which is played out over this next few hours as Jesus agonises in the garden alone with his Father while his disciples sleep, as he is betrayed and abandoned, mocked and scourged and finally nailed to the cross where his body is broken and his blood poured out. These events of the last supper help us to understand what loving one another as he loves us really means. Over the next few days the story of Christ's passion and resurrection is told. The question is, as we listen to the narrative will we be by-standers or participants?

This evening in this service, we may, if we so desire experience for ourselves those events in a paradox of time.

In the washing of feet and the breaking of bread, the wine poured out, the watch in the garden and final desertion I pray that we may understand a little of what loving one another as Christ loves us looks like.

Tomorrow, we walk with Him to the cross but for tonight we remember and own the Last Supper for ourselves.