

Maundy Thursday is the day we remember our marching orders. The word 'Maundy' comes from the same root as command, or mandate, or commandment. Today is the day we remember what we are commanded to do.

In our OT lesson, the people of Israel get their marching orders. God tells them many things. God is basically saying, 'You're leaving Egypt tomorrow. Tonight, I want you to prepare a Passover dinner. And from now on, this day shall be a day of remembrance for you. Every time you eat this meal, I want you and your descendants to remember how I brought you to freedom.'

That same theme of remembrance is carried over into another Passover meal some 1,200 years later. Jesus is at table with his disciples. And Jesus gives them their marching orders: 'Love one another. Serve one another. Follow my example.' But also, 'Break the bread, drink the wine. Do it in remembrance of me.'

And, like the Passover, every time we eat this meal, Jesus wants us and our descendants to remember how he brought us to freedom.'

The act is simple. The elements are common-place. Ordinary bread and wine are taken, blessed, broken and shared. To outsiders, it probably appears very weird for all of us to gather together, and for me to stand up front waving my hands over little discs of flatbread and a cup of wine. To the outside world, what we're doing probably looks crazy.

And yet, what we do has incredibly deep meaning. St. Paul makes it clear: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." In other words, Maundy Thursday is intimately tied to Good Friday. Communion is tied directly to Crucifixion. The bread of Maundy Thursday is connected to a body hung on a cross on Good Friday. The wine of Maundy Thursday is connected to burgundy red blood shed on Good Friday. At the Last Supper, Jesus took, set apart, broke, and gave the bread. On the cross, Jesus was taken, set apart, broken, and his very life was given for us.

In Exodus, it was the blood of the sacrificed lamb that saved the people during the first Passover. On Good Friday, it is the blood of the sacrificed Lamb of God that saves us, then, now, and for all time.

Thus, what we do in the Eucharist is an incredible mystery. Ordinary bread and wine are spiritually transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This common ordinary bread and wine are a means of sharing in the substance of our Lord. They are a means by which Jesus is especially present with us, even today.

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, what is ordinary becomes extraordinary, so that we, ordinary humans, might share in the extraordinary new life of God's grace. "Do this," Jesus says, "in remembrance of me."

The whole thing is mind boggling. It strains our understanding past the breaking point. Broken bread somehow becoming an aspect of his broken body. Wine poured into a cup somehow becoming an aspect of his blood poured out on our behalf.

We can't really understand why we are commanded to eat this meal. It's not a meal any of us would likely order in a restaurant. It's not a meal any of us would think to ask for. And yet, Jesus says, "Do it. Eat my flesh. Drink my blood."

All we can do, is stick out our hands, partake, and say, 'Thank you. I don't understand, but thank you.'

Jesus says, "Do it," and we do it. Week after week we do it. Year after year, decade after decade we do it. We come to God's table, and we are fed.

The mystery of the Eucharist is not something we can fully understand or comprehend. Rather it is something we do. Our Lord says, 'Bring your lives and your hearts to my table. Take, bless, break, and give the bread and wine. And as you do so, take, bless, break, and give the substance of your own lives. Be fed. Be changed. And proclaim my saving death until I come again. Those are your orders. That is what you're commanded to do.'

"This bread is my body broken is for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you eat my body and drink my blood, do this in remembrance of me."