

“DO ...,” AS OUR LORD SAYS SO

Commemorating Maundy Thursday

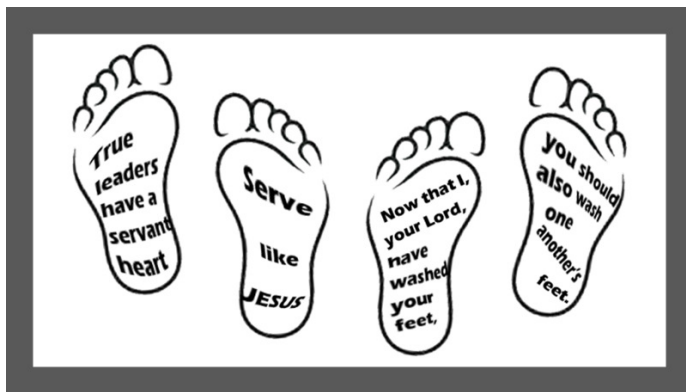
Christians are familiar with Good Friday and Easter Sunday. In Singapore, even non-Christians are reminded of Good Friday every year because it is a public holiday. To some, it is anticipated “long weekends” for travelling. The stories of Easter bunnies and Easter eggs also form mental images of Easter even in children.

Before Good Friday is Maundy Thursday. What is Maundy Thursday???

Alright, if you are in the Lutheran church every year celebrating Maundy Thursday and listening to related sermons, you would not be unacquainted with the Lord’s washing of His disciples’ feet and the Lord’s Supper (Institution of the Eucharist) on this day. These two acts of the Lord make it important for us to remember the day (Maundy Thursday). There are weighty messages that Maundy Thursday convey.

In our Service, we remember and reflect on the 2 commands (“mandata”) of Jesus given that night. By emphasizing His word, not only His acts, we are drawn to receive and appropriate His promises as well – “for the forgiveness of your sins” and “as I have loved you.”

Washing of Feet (Servant Leadership)



On the face of it, this act showed that Jesus was a very kind and helpful person to those around Him. In the custom of that time, it was usually the duty of a servant to wash the feet of others, and

never would it be for a person of higher status to stoop down to wash the feet of someone of lower status.

Rather than being ignorant of the custom, the Lord was doing the act with deliberate purpose. This was shown by the instructions He gave immediately following the act (John 13:14-15, 17):

- *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”*
- *“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*

More than just telling His disciples to be humble, kind and helpful as good collective etiquette, Jesus was giving a demonstration of servant leadership.

In one-dimensional understanding, servanthood is for those who are servants (those who serve), and leadership is for those who are leaders (those who lead). You are, in one dimension, a servant to your boss; and, in a separate dimension, a leader to your subordinates. As a servant, you play the role of serving others (“doing feet-washing”); but as a leader, you play the role of sitting back and be served (“have your feet washed”). So, you are both a servant and a leader as you consider yourself as a servant-cum-leader. **Surely, this is not the Lord’s idea of servant leadership.**

What is the Lord’s idea of servant leadership?

After washing His disciples’ feet, Jesus said to them, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” (John 13:13)

Evidently, Jesus performed the role of servanthood knowing Himself as a leader to those whom He served.

This is what I would describe as a two-dimensional idea of servant leadership whereby one can be concurrently a servant and leader in his relationship with the same people. A person with servant-leadership

quality is always ready to perform the role of serving others knowingly as a leader who exercises strong leadership upon the same people.

When Jesus told the disciples to “wash one another’s feet”, it was also implied that between themselves of the same level of relationship, they should also not shun the idea of serving one another.

In the church, a leader with servant leadership quality who is leading or co-working with his fellow brethren should not be averse to lift a finger to serve those under him or collaborating with him where it is helpful for the overall objective of service to the Lord.

The Lord said, *“Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”*

This put to rest any misgivings that the leaders might have about forming wrong ideas in the servants’ minds when they (the servants) are being served – for the subordinates will still not be relieved from their dutiful roles despite the help given by their servant-leaders.

(Jesus’ model of servant leadership neither means that the leaders do the jobs of the subordinates for them nor does it breed irresponsibility in any way.)

Maundy Thursday reminds us that Jesus also linked the foot washing to the words “love one another; *just as I have loved you*, you also are to love one another”. In pure, divine love He washed His disciples’ feet, including Judas’ feet – thus giving us a demonstrated promise of His love for us sinners, who are totally incapable of God-pleasing servanthood, much less servant-leadership. This is the promise which we remember through the rite of foot washing, and which enables us to obey His command to love, even to love those who would betray us.

Look at the example of Mother Teresa. To thousands of the poor and weak, she was willing to be their servant. She lived her life in servanthood with a meek heart and sacrificial love. She carried an unassuming personality, never thinking of herself as a leader. However, in the eyes of the public and her followers, she was a great leader who trans-

formed lives spiritually by her influence and her dedication as a disciple who followed Jesus Christ. So, was Mother Teresa a servant or a leader? She was a humble servant-leader.

Mother Teresa was also a very apt example of how servanthood and leadership can be concurrently demonstrated by oneself in a relationship with the same people.

Mother Teresa did not aspire to be a leader. Most people like to be called a leader. (It sounds nice.) 😊 Few feel prides in saying “I am a servant.” 😞 Therefore, many aspire to leadership and aim to do their duties with dedication to aspire to higher leadership. It is called “climbing the leadership ladder”, which comes with growing recognition and satisfying emotional rewards. Where there is positivity in leadership aspiration, this is to be encouraged. Imagine it if nobody aspires to be leaders. The church cannot function without leaders. However, the best kind of leadership in anyone’s ambition should not be the “pure” kind of leadership. It should be “alloy” – leadership mixed with the “impurity” called servanthood. I call servanthood “impurity” because, by excuse of “pragmatism”, it is something fewer people primarily display.

It is common knowledge that an alloy is usually stronger than the parts. **Is the church prepared for the challenge to raise up more of the strong “alloy” called servant-leaders?**

Returning to what our Lord Jesus Christ said, “*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*”

The Lord’s Supper (Institution of the Eucharist)

The Eucharist (Sacrament of Holy Communion) was instituted by the Lord on Maundy Thursday. It took place on that evening just after Jesus pointed out Judas as His would-be betrayer. (Mt 26:23-25) Therefore, in setting up **the new covenant**, it was in Jesus’ full knowledge of

the event to happen – the sacrifice of His body and shedding of His blood on the Cross:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

*Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of **the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.

– Mt 26:26-29 (NKJV)



Note Jesus’ use of the words “the new covenant”, which suggests to us that the institution of the last supper was in replacement of an old covenant. The old covenant was a covenant between God and His people (the Israelites). If only man obeyed God’s rules in the old covenant, he would be blessed by God. Unfortunately,

the Jews violated many of God’s commandments and had to rely on many sacrificial rituals to cleanse them from their sins.

The Lord’s Supper instituted by Jesus on Maundy Thursday is a sign and seal of the new covenant. More generally speaking, this new covenant is between Christ and those (including us who are Gentiles) who trust in Him as Saviour.

In celebrating Maundy Thursday, we recognize that Christ has become the once-and-for-all sacrifice, the pure lamb on the Cross, and we no longer must perform the animal sacrificial offerings practised by the Jewish High Priests in the OT times.

In some Bible translations, “the new covenant” is mentioned as “the new testament”.

We are in the NT era, or New Covenant era, and we remember this passage of Scripture which is relevant to both Jews and Gentiles:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” – John 3:16-17

On Good Friday, when Jesus received His last drink of wine vinegar from the Roman soldiers while He was on the Cross, He said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

So, we know that the new covenant was set up by Christ himself on Maundy Thursday and settled on the Cross on Good Friday. The once-and-for-all sacrifice on the altar (the Cross) was the body and blood of God’s only Child, our Lord Jesus.

Looking at the bread and the wine that Christ gave to His disciples to take and drink, it is not implausible that people’s first thought of the Holy Communion is in physical terms and symbolism. Similarly, looking at the body of Christ crucified on the Cross and the blood of Christ shed on the Cross, it is not implausible for people to think only in physical terms and symbolism. Let us not stop our contemplation at the physical point. Let us go further:

- Of the bread given for His disciples, the Lord said, “Take, eat, this **is** my body.” (Mt 26:26) Note that He didn’t say, “Take, eat,

this represents my body.” (You can check this out in all the bible translations online.)

- Of the cup handed to His disciples to drink from, the Lord said, “... this **is** my blood of the new covenant ...” Note that He didn’t say, “... this represents my blood ...” ((You can check this out in all the bible translations online.)

Unequivocally, all the bible translations present the same fact that the bread and wine of the Holy Communion **are** (do not merely “represent”) the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

- The physical bread and wine are *“the external visible elements through which the body and blood of Christ are communicated, and the Holy Supper is the sacred act in which this takes place.”*¹
- According to the Lutheran Book of Concord, *“we confess our belief that in the Lord’s Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly offered with those things that are seen, the bread and the wine, to those who receive the sacrament.”*²

One may feel challenged to fathom the spiritual attributes of the bread and wine of Holy Communion, but challenges in themselves do not negate the truths that many in their meditations on tough spiritual issues get to discover.

The Holy Communion was instituted on Maundy Thursday with the following words direct from the Lord’s mouth (1 Cor 11:23-25):

¹ Schmid, H. (1889). *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Verified from the Original Sources.*

² Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.*

- “... eat ... this is my body...”
- “... drink ... this is my blood ...”
- “... do this ... in remembrance of me.”

The bread and wine of Holy Communion are as real and true as the crucified body and shed blood on the Cross whereby our participation in the sacrament (as instituted by Christ on **Maundy Thursday**) bears intimate nexus to our participation in the remission of sins on the Cross (on **Good Friday**) and to us being united with Christ in His resurrection on **Easter Sunday**. (Rom 6:5)

Conclusion

1. Do meditate on the significance of Maundy Thursday in our commemoration.
2. Do be servant-leaders ... as the Lord says so.
3. Do partake of the Holy Communion in remembrance of Christ ... as the Lord says so.

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