

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2020

There are many fascinating similarities between tonight and tomorrow. There are many beautiful things that define both days. The two important ones are the isolation of Jesus, the social-distancing of His disciples and Jesus's connection to the Father through prayer. The isolation and social-distancing are interesting concepts for us now as we consider the situation we find ourselves in.

Lent this year has been one of imposed fasting, prayer and social distancing. This has been the new normal for the observant Christian. As we find ourselves in a very strange Holy Week, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday have a deeper Christ centered meaning. There seems to be a greater focus on the struggles of Christ as we are better able to relate to His situation. Our understanding has been expanded by our own isolation and social-distancing. Lent has truly been preparing us for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We have been forced to step out of ourselves and to empathize with Our Lord. This may have been the Lent nobody wanted, but it is the Lent that everybody needed. This was an opportunity to draw closer to our Lord in our isolation and social-distancing. This should give our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday a far deeper meaning and experience.

Tonight Jesus reinterprets the Seder meal as a sacrifice of His body and blood when we remember Him. He personally identifies with the bread and wine. This is all about self-sacrifice for others. We are commissioned to build community that is centered on Him through bread and wine when we remember Him. In this profound reinterpretation of Seder, those around the table do not understand what has happened. To add to their lack of understanding Jesus quotes Zecharia 13:7. This is to serve as a warning of what is to come. "Awake oh! Sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate, says the Lord of hosts, strike the shepherd that the sheep may be scattered."

The stage is set and it will start in Gethsemane. Jesus will take His three inner disciples with Him. There He will ask them to pray while He goes off to pray alone. In the gospels we are never told that the disciples actually prayed. They asked Jesus how they should pray, but we are never told that they went and prayed. In three separate occasions Jesus returns to find

them sleeping. The disciples are physically there but they have checked out otherwise. At this point Jesus realizes that He is truly alone and cannot rely on the three. There are times in life where you can be in a crowd surrounded by people and feel completely alone. Without connection to another human being. Jesus knows that He is alone and that the disciples have already started to fall away even before Judas and the temple guards arrive.

Matthew records Jesus's personal prayer with God in Gethsemane. This is only one of two times we are given an insight into Our Lord's prayer. Mat 26:39 "O' My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me. Never the less, not as I will but as You will." Then in Mat 26:43, "O' My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me unless I drink it, your will be done." The other time we get a prayer of Jesus's is in Golgotha. Where an isolated and abandoned Jesus cries out praying Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken Me."

In Gethsemane and in Golgotha, Jesus shows us the proper response to suffering. That is faith expressed in prayer to a God that does not abandon us. It will be His prayers to God the Father that will sustain Jesus during His isolation and crucifixion. When the twelve abandoned Him out of fear Jesus only had God the Father to talk to in prayer. We may be isolated but we are not abandoned. We should use our social-distancing in a Christian way to remember what Jesus taught us this evening. We are not abandoned and that God is still in charge. His ears are always open to our prayers. When we gather we should remember Jesus. We build community around Jesus when we do communion. That it is a mystery we should take on faith. Seek God in prayer and you will find him. Hold on to Him and He will stay." St. Arsenius.

Pastor D.