

## + MAUNDY THURSDAY: IN CENA DOMINI

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
April 1, 2021

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Before the festival day of the Pasch, Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end.<sup>1</sup>*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My Very Dear Sons,

Many are the facets of this great mystery of Maundy Thursday; multiple are the aspects under which we might contemplate this entry into the Passion of the Lord. In past years we have considered some of these aspects, including the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the great and new commandment of fraternal charity that Jesus gave to His Apostles during the washing of the feet, and the very Passion of the Messiah itself that occupies the heart and mind of Holy Church during the entire Triduum.

This evening I thought we might focus on the imminent departure of the Lord, on the very fact that He is going to die and leave his Apostles (whom he called “friends”), initially for three days and three nights, but eventually until the end of time or until each one of them (and each one of us, as we hope) would meet Him again at the moment of his or her own death. As is often the case, when we pray about this and enter more deeply into the mystery, we discover amazing things.

We poor mortal human beings, still treading the earth under the shadow of the fear of death, have such a limited understanding! For Our Lord death was not a thing to be rejected as such. In fact, He longed for the day of this great departure. Speaking of His death he said: “And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?”<sup>2</sup> The Saints, certain of them especially, likewise held this more positive understanding of death. Saint Faustina is eloquent in this regard:

O bright and clear day on which all my dreams will be fulfilled; O day so eagerly desired, the last day of my life! I look forward with joy to the last stroke the Divine Artist will trace on my soul, which will give my soul a unique beauty that will distinguish me from the beauty of other souls. O great day, on which divine love will be confirmed in me. On that day, for the first time, I shall sing before heaven and earth the song of the Lord’s fathomless mercy. This is my work and the mission which the Lord has destined for me from the beginning of the world. That the song of my soul may be pleasing to the Holy Trinity, do You, O Spirit of God, direct and form my soul Yourself. I arm myself with patience and await Your coming, O merciful God, and as to the terrible pains and fear of death, at this moment more than at any other time, I trust in the abyss of Your mercy and am reminding You, O merciful Jesus, sweet Savior, of all the promises You have made to me.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Faustina is a realist: she does not take lightly the matter of death, but she is full of theological hope, the “kindly light” Saint John Henry Newman wrote of:

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<sup>1</sup> John 13:1.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:50.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Faustina, *Diary*, n. 825.

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on!  
 The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on!  
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.<sup>4</sup>

As we follow the Lord in His terrible Passion, one step at a time is all we can hope to manage. As Judas goes out into the night to consummate his evil deed and the Apostles struggle—mostly unsuccessfully—to understand it all, an atmosphere of uneasiness descends upon the disciples and upon us too. What breaks somewhat this anxious feeling, however, among other shafts of Divine light, is the solemn and unique Discourse of Farewell of the Lord that we find in the Gospel according to Saint John. If ever a man about to die gave testimony to all that is most important in Heaven and on earth, this is it. Every line is an eternal witness to the truth and love which is God.

Amen, amen I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

A woman, when she is in labor, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So also you now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you... These things I have spoken to you in proverbs. The hour cometh, when I will no more speak to you in proverbs, but will shew you plainly of the Father.

In that day you shall ask in my name; and I say not to you, that I will ask the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and I go to the Father...

Behold, the hour cometh, and it is now come, that you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world.<sup>5</sup>

At the back of our minds—rarely at the point of our intelligence—remains the question of our own passing out of this world. Saint Benedict bids his monks “to keep death daily before one’s eyes.”<sup>6</sup> Why should we do this? There are many reasons, the most obvious of which is to be prepared for that important moment. But, at the crucial moment of a personal history, the death of a Christian, like that of the Lord, can and should be a supreme act of abandonment to God and of love, something good in this sense, something precious, something beautiful even. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,” exclaims the psalmist.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, as we follow the dramatic events of the Passion, as they unfold for us in prayer and contemplation this evening and for the next few days, God will enlighten us further about the real sense of this mysterious reality, which Saint Francis of Assisi referred to in his Canticle, dictated upon his death bed: “Praised be my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death, from whom no living person can escape.” No doubt, we will recall as well the consoling presence of Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, that Mother Christ gave to Saint John and to us all, the Mother who leads us gently through the trials of life and will be there through our last hours on this earth. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> 1834.

<sup>5</sup> John 16:21-33.

<sup>6</sup> *Rule*, Chapter 4, Instrument 47.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 115 (116):15.