*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God and was going to God, got up from supper, took off His outer robe, and tied a towel around Himself. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him: “Lord, are You going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered: “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Peter said to Him: “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered: “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to Him: “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him: “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” For He knew who was to betray Him; for this reason He said: “Not all of you are clean.” After He had washed their feet, had put on His robe, and had reclined again, He said to them:* *“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord, and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him. If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself and will glorify Him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you: ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* John 13:1-17, 31b-35

*A little boy was in a heated argument with his sister about who was going to get the last brownie. His mother overheard the loud discussion in their kitchen and came in to resolve the conflict. Her two children were obviously very distraught about getting that final treat. Sensing the need to teach a deeper truth, the mom asked her children that ever-relevant question: “What would Jesus do?” The older sibling immediately answered, “That’s easy, Jesus would just break the brownie and make five thousand more!”*

Mandatum Novum – A New Commandment

1. *“Maudy Thursday,”* we use the name, but where does it come from? It comes from Latin: *“A New Commandment.”* After washing the feet of His disciples in the *“Upper Room,”* Jesus asked them: *“Do you know what I have done for you?”* This is an important question because it answers the reason why we celebrate tonight. As we quickly approach the end of the season we refer to as *“Lent,”* the time of reflection and the time of meditation focusing on the *“Passion of Christ”* must be fully understood and to do so, one must realize the importance of the new *“commandment,”* Jesus introduced with His action that night. Different churches and different denominations have very different views of *“Lent”* and although many celebrate it with the formal liturgies, others do not and some even condemn the tradition of the *“Lenten”* celebration. I on the other hand do not want to defend or to condemn those who do or do not celebrate *“Lent,”* but I want all of us to understand what this time truly means to the followers of Jesus Christ.

2. In result of the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and referencing the records of the Early Church’s tradition of fasting before Easter, the Roman Catholic Church, enshrined *“Lent”* as an annual observance in the churches calendar and eventually developed a liturgy for it to be followed. Lent is the time when while reflecting on Jesus’ last days before His crucifixion, as His Church, we too must understand the events occurring in the *“Upper Room,”* as equally important to everything that followed this night. In that room and during the most important of the Jewish *“Holy Days,”* the *“Passover,”* Jesus expressed His incredible love for His creation. His love also requires forgiveness and caring for one another, and it calls for an active support of one another, no matter what. But to do so we need the sort of love that is not of a human origin because we, as the species, are to imperfect and to sinful, even though we are His creation, but of Christ and the events of *“Maundy Thursday”* offer us such love. As His followers, we need the sort of love that only He could create in us. I might have disagreed with the theology of Mother Theresa on certain issues, but I cannot deny the truth that she was able to practice this truly genuine love of Christ.

3. On that particular night Jesus showed His love first by willingly performing a humiliating work and then requiring of His followers to embrace the love He taught. Washing of the feet was usually done by a lowest of the household slaves, and yet Jesus poured water into a basin and washed the feet of His disciples. John wrote that Jesus knew that God offered Him all things in His power, and that He was the Son of God, yet what He does is beyond a simple service, a simple task. This might not be very clear for us today to comprehend because our realities of life are different. *“How many of us though would be willing to do such task and wash the feet of others?”* Jesus act is that of remarkable humility, even if we would see Him only as a *“Rabbi,”* a *“Teacher,”* and yet, in reality Jesus is much more, He is the *“Son of God.”* So, no wonder that Peter was appalled when Jesus came to wash his feet. He vehemently protested: *“No, not my feet!”* Answering his objection Jesus says: *“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”* This is important because Jesus’ words indicate that even His closest associates, His disciples, needed to be cleansed and not only from the dust covering their feet, but from the sins of their souls. The same applies to us. Jesus might not physically *“wash our feet”* today, but He keeps on *“washing away sins from our souls.”*

4. This *“soul washing”* occurs in the next step of that night, the time when He placed the bread and the wine in front of His disciples and told them, to eat it and drink it: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”* Jesus knew that He needs to die on the *“altar of the cross”* as an atonement for our sins and that night He wanted His disciples to understand what the act of washing their feet is really all about. Unless we too understand the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ actions, we might be inclined to see the *“Upper Room’s”* story as just another event in Jesus’ life and ministry. Just as many of the churches where the *“washing of the feet”* became a part of the *“ritual,”* often see Jesus’ action as a tradition only. As much as the service provided by Jesus that night was humiliating, so was His death on the cross of Calvary. Apostle Paul will write: *“He humbled Himself to the death, even death on the cross.”* To be nailed to a cross was so shameful that no Roman citizen could have been ordered to the death on the cross. While many Christians were crucified in the time of the *“Roman persecution of Christians,”* Paul was beheaded, because he was a Roman citizen. And Jesus accepted this humiliating death to free us from the slavery to sin.

5. He did it to show his love for us, and what is even more remarkable, He did it not when we became His followers, but when we were still His enemies. He did this while we were still blind to His teachings and wanted nothing to do with Him. Can we understand what sort of love prompted Him to do so? *“Do you know what I have done for you?”* Do we indeed know what Jesus did, and not that night in the *“Upper Room,”* but the next day, when He was nailed to the cross? Only when we are able to grasp this, we will understand His love for us and His sacrifice for us. Only when we do embrace Him, we will be confident enough, to achieve with His help and guidance, anything. That’s why it is so important to understand what He has done for us. Only when we understand this, we will not hesitate to take our troubles to Him in prayer, knowing that He will respond because He cares for us. In his recollection of the *“Upper Room”* event, Luke writes that the disciples argued who among them was the greatest. Their quarrel might have been what prompted Jesus to take His action and to teach them that He is setting an example, that they and consequently us, should do as He has done. *“Do you know what I have done to you?”* There is no denial that as humans we are a proud and selfish species, and we need to learn the importance of humility and self-sacrifice. The disciples needed to learn that lesson and so do we. Our arrogance must be replaced with modesty, our wanting with service, and our desire with need.

6. As I observed our society for all the years of my life, I see that many people, including many *“churchgoers,”* do not have any idea, or have some sort of a perverted idea of what Jesus has done for us. He humbled Himself, and not only in His life but in His death, and this is the underlying story of the *“Upper Room.”* He shows us His love for us, love that not only made Him to wash His disciples’ feet, but love that lead Him to the cross: *“the emblem of suffering and shame.”* In that story we must see that if we are to be comforted in any way, if our broken hearts might be mended, we must alienate ourselves from the pettiness and selfishness of our human *“ego’s”* and embrace the humility Jesus has shown us that night. *“Whoever wants to be a master, must become a servant first,”* but this comes only from love He not only indicates but teaches us and offered us. In His love we see *“forgiveness in action,”* and with His love in our hearts, we will find the strength to do as He says, act as He asks us to act, and *“do to others as He has done for us.”* With His example we will look not only for our interests but for the interests of others and in doing so we will put the needs of others ahead of our own.

7. As I see this world I see so many people who feel *“entitled.”* Kids feel that their parents are to provide for them, even when they grow up and should be on their own, and many parents also feel that they are responsible for their kids welfare. This might sound as a *“caring person’s book,”* but in reality it is quite opposite. I have a good friend who was always taken care of by his father who never taught him to *“fix”* anything at home, and today, at the age of 55 he has difficulties to swing a hammer. How about the kids taking some responsibility and helping mom and dad with some *“chores”* around the house? How about parents loving their children to the point that they too must be disciplined, trained in various responsibilities. How about the same kids to be taught that they are responsible for their own actions? On the other hand, how about husbands and wives wanting to see their spouses to do more for them without feeling any responsibility to do the same? How about those partners who quarrel about which one’s career, goals and ambitions are more important? How about the *“church members”* who wonder why their church doesn’t do more for them but who are unwilling to offer themselves in service so that more can be done? How about simply accepting the words of JF Kennedy who said: *“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country?”* Nobody is entitled to anything; God’s grace is a freely offered gift. As we celebrate our Savior’s great sacrifice tonight, may our lives provide the answers to how we may be able to show the same humility, love for others, and faithfulness to our Savior, as He did it for us.