

**Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020**

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## **At the Heart of It All—Love!**

Exodus 20:17; John 13:1

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

During Lent, we have been walking through the Ten Commandments. Tonight, we consider the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, given by the Lord through Moses: **“You shall not cover your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s”** (v 17). At the same time, we meditate on John chapter 13 verse 1: **Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**

All the commandments are summed up in one word: *love*. The first and greatest commandment, Jesus says, is **“love the Lord your God,”** and the second is like it—**“love your neighbor as yourself”** (Mt 22:36–40). On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus gave His disciples **“a new commandment, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another”** (Jn 13:34–35). St. Paul echoes this in Romans, **“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law”** (Rom 12:8).

So what’s the opposite of love? Our first response is probably to say that hate is love’s opposite. They’re certainly incompatible. No one can truly love God whom he can’t see while hating his brother whom he can see (1 Jn 4:20). Another opposite of love is fear. St. John writes, **“There is no fear in love”** (1 Jn 4:18). Our current situation shows that the reverse is also true. There is no love in fear or in panic or in worry. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments suggest one more opposite of love: coveting, the sinful desire of our hearts for what our neighbors have.

The opposite of love is to be coiled like a serpent. To be curved in on myself. To be held captive by my sinful desires and selfish thoughts. The opposite of real love is to “love” myself to the bitter end, to love myself above God and everyone else. To

“love” myself to death and then right on into hell.

One of the results of the coronavirus is that it has unmasked us. It feeds on our deepest fears. It shows what we really trust in. It reveals just how much we love ourselves and our lives above all things. It makes us discontent with our present circumstances. I covet life as it used to be, so long ago in February or January or way back in 2019.

Now it's Holy Week. Not the Holy Week we had planned or anticipated, but still Holy Week. Still the week when we marvel at and ponder what our Lord has done for us when He went to cross, and when we marvel at and rejoice in what our Lord still does for us today.

Though so much has changed, one thing has not changed. One thing remains the same: our Lord Jesus Christ and His love. Our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us Himself. Though everything else may be taken away, our Lord serves us with His own life, with His life-giving Word, with His gifts. We're reminded of what He told the disciples: **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many”** (Mk 10:45). The season we're living through makes me wonder: how much *is* enough? What do I need? What can I learn to be content with? Can I learn to be content with His love, with the gift of Christ Himself, even when so many other things fall away and are taken from us? My prayer this Holy Week is that I would learn to be content with Him, even if all I can have of Him is His Word. His Word that is true and full of life, bringing Christ into your ears and right into your hearts. In place of our longings for the past, our selfish and sinful desires, He offers Himself for our contentment. His death on the cross, and soon the celebration of His resurrection from the dead. Our Lord Jesus came not to cling to His life but to lay it down for you.

You heard how St. John begins the night of our Lord's betrayal: **Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end** (Jn 13:1). He didn't love Himself. He didn't love His own life. He loved you, right to the end, to the nails in His hands, and the crown of thorns on His head, and the spear in His side. That's how much our Lord loved and you, despite our misplaced fear, trust, and love. He loved *you* fully and completely.

When our Lord took the position of servant, wrapped His garment around Himself, knelt down, and washed the feet of St. Peter and the other disciples, that was love. It was a picture of what He do the next day on the cross. On the cross, He is the servant

of servants, and the servant of those who are least and last and live in fear and are coiled in. He serves them. He serves you with His death.

When our Lord washed them and declared them to be clean by His washing and His Word, that was love. When He washed you with His Word in Holy Baptism, He loved you, too, and He washed your sins right away. He washed you into His own death and resurrection.

When our Lord gave His body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, that was love. He did it for you. How we long for that gift again! How we miss that gift! How we look forward to the feast of love! Here, we pray, soon. We hunger and thirst for His righteousness to be placed into our mouths. And it will be. We know what lies ahead—the wedding feast of the Lamb is coming. No one can take that from us!

When our Lord went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed, “Not My will but Thine be done,” that was love. He put Himself into the hands of the Father, who willed your salvation through His suffering and death.

Our Lord poured His heart out into Holy Week, into love for you. He didn’t covet what His neighbors had. He coveted, He desired, He longed to give Himself to you. To the very end, He loved. He loved God above all things, and He loved you, His neighbors, more than He loved Himself. This is the love that we need, the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. The love that comes from His cross, poured out on us in Holy Baptism, serve to us in Holy Communion.

Love and fear don’t coexist, but **perfect love casts out fear** (1 Jn 4:20). When there are so many things to fear, His perfect love delivers us from our fear. The perfect love of our Lord forgives us of our selfishness and sin. The perfect love of our Lord takes us to the end and beyond.

**Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end** (Jn 13:1). And then beyond, to the endless world to come.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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