

MAUNDY THURSDAY

MARCH 24, 2016

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"THE FIRST SUPPER: MANDATES AND MUNCHIES" ST. JOHN, OCEAN CITY, NJ

During tough economic times, when people are looking to cut back on expenses, the first thing that goes... is eating out! And the restaurant industry has noticed. Some eateries have lowered their prices. Some are offering more coupons. Some have rewritten their menus and redecorated their rooms to make for more casual dining. Some have increased advertising and only some of these things have actually worked.

The reason, according to the experts: blame it on the baby boomers! The size of this generation makes it a force in the economy and boomers are starting to retire. The numbers are high! The funds are low! So there you go! If we do eat out, we are looking for a dollar menu and the rest of the time it's *"Who's cooking tonight?"*

Of course, we will make our own decisions about how often we will eat out. But one meal we should eat out whenever possible is COMMUNION. And by *"eat out"* I mean get out to Church to share communion with the people of God. Or I could say, *"One meal we definitely should eat IN, is communion."* That is, communion is an INSIDE family meal. Take your pick: Eat in or eat out! One meal we should not skip is communion.

So let's begin with the name. Some will call it the Eucharist, other the Lord's Supper, and for some the meaning of Maundy Thursday brings out the title LAST SUPPER. But when we stop to think about what really happened on this most Holy Night, we've got the name wrong! We should be calling this the FIRST SUPPER. This is just the beginning! From here we are sent, nourished and strengthened by what we have received, to do what God intends us to do. To do what Jesus commands us to do. And that is where the MAUNDY, MANDATE or COMMAND comes in. Jesus says, *"Take and eat! Take and drink! Do this to remember Me!"* And finally Jesus says, *"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* Here is the FIRST SUPPER. THE MANDATES ARE MANY AND THE MUNCHIES ARE FEW.

Admittedly, the Lord's Supper is for a different kind of nourishment than a regular meal. Jesus needed the fellowship of communion that night, because of what He was going to face over the next few hours. In that sense, sharing the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday is a little different from the other times we share this meal. Most of the time, we think of it in terms of what we receive from the Supper! But on the night before Jesus' crucifixion, we can also think of it in terms of what Jesus received from this meal with His disciples and what we receive from this meal with the others who are here. FIRST SUPPER! MANY MANDATES! FEW MUNCHIES!

The history of the Lord's Supper is no less unique! When Communion was celebrated in the first-century Church, it was different from how we do it today. In the early Church, it was celebrated as part of an actual meal that believers ate together. Not the Passover as Jesus did with His Disciples, but an actual meal to satisfy normal daily hunger. But at some point in the meal, they would share some bread and wine, probably along with prayer, to make the connection to Jesus' last meal. In fact the meal itself was probably like a potluck dinner, with each family bringing something. So now we know where the Church got that idea... we've been doing covered dish dinners for a couple thousand years. Thank You, Jesus!

The First Supper was never meant to be a solo act, with each person doing their own thing, apart from all the others gathered at the table. In the Letter to the Hebrews we read: *"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* Sometimes we miss that idea of doing this TOGETHER!

I offer a story that makes this point clear.

A man tells of something he saw when traveling in India that helped him understand better the idea of the true Church. He was visiting a Christian community where people were suffering from leprosy. When it came time for lunch, he headed for the central dining room. On the way, he heard the sound of laughter behind him. Turning around, he saw two young men, one riding on the back of the other. Pretending to be horse and rider, they were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Then he noticed that the man doing the carrying was blind, and the man being carried was lame. The man without eyes used his feet; the man without feet used his eyes. Together they get their food and together they shared their food.

That's the idea of the Church. The Church is not about solo Christians living our lives in isolation. Christianity is a fellowship of the followers of Jesus. Communion is the common meal of the Church. Being saved by grace through faith is the spiritual experience that we have in common with every other child of God. In that sense, what we do when we come to communion in Church is *"eat out."* We are fed together! FIRST SUPPER! MANY MANDATES! FEW MUNCHIES!

"Take and eat! Take and drink! Love as I love you!"

We do not come to this meal because we think we are so good! We come to this meal because we are anything but good. We doubt! We worry! We get angry! We are frustrated! We feel weak! And we fail more often than we succeed! We are starving to death... and then we are fed. FIRST SUPPER! MANY MANDATES! FEW MUNCHIES!

Don't get me wrong! It is important for us to feed our spiritual lives at home, with private prayer, personal Bible reading and meditation on what God has called us to do. That is eating and feeding at home! EATING IN! But when it comes to our life of faith, we also need to EAT OUT, in the company of other Christians. For what we get when we are gathered together, cannot be done at home alone!

FIRST SUPPER! MANY MANDATES! FEW MUNCHIES!

"Take and eat! Take and drink! Love as I love you!" MANY MANDATES!

While the actual food that we get at the altar is not much to speak of... we are not here to put on the pounds. We are here to put on the grace of God, the love of Jesus, and the power of the Spirit.

THE MANDATES MAKE UP FOR THE MUNCHIES!

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed.

And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!