

Tonight we continue to focus upon our Lenten Theme: Witness, Mercy Life Together. God is Most High, He can only look down. Nothing is above Him; no one is more exalted than He, so His eyes have no need to look up, only down. His eyes bend downward, earthward, to behold you and me in the depths of our despair and depression.

And what does God see when He looks down on us? He sees those who only want to look up, above themselves. But the things above to which we look are not the things of God, but the things of the world. We do not lift up our eyes to the Lord, from where our help comes from. We do not call upon the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. We all strive after that which is above us, after honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, a life of what-ever-makes-me-happy; those things which today are and tomorrow fade away. We are not willing to look down deep inside ourselves, into the depths of our own poverty, our own disgrace, our own squalor, our own misery and anguish, we do not look at the great need of our neighbor. We do not fear, love and trust in God above all things and we do not love our neighbor as ourselves. We love ourselves and that is all the farther that we look.

We are madmen. We like to make-believe that we live in ivory towers while our neighbor dwells in the city slums. We pretend that our neighbor is not worthy of our concern and compassion and mercy. The reality of our selfishness and nothingness is too painful to confess, so we pretend that we are someone that we are not. We keep our eyes pointed upward, always looking away from whatever might remind us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Repent of such thoughts. Live as witnesses of Christ, for the Church and the world.

How do we do that? We are dust and to dust we shall return, we need to admit that we are dust. We need to drop the make-believe and confess the reality. If we must be madmen then we must be mad about our neighbor, mad about the pit of sin and death he has dug himself into, we must be mad about the slums of despair and hopelessness that he calls his heart and the life he lives. We need

to pray for mercy, that God would create in us clean hearts and renew within us a right spirit; that God would not cast us away from His presence, that we can love our neighbor as ourself.

We better not look up but look down, for in looking down we are like God, who only has eyes for the lowly. In Christ, blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In Christ, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. In Christ, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. In Christ, blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. In Christ, blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. It is through these "*blesseds*" that we, who are joined to Christ and live our life together toward our neighbor in the church and in the world.

In looking down we will see who our neighbor is, that he has needs. We need to see our neighbor's sin, not to make us look better and feel better; but to realize that He needs Jesus. Our neighbor, in his sin, needs to know the love of Jesus, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, which was accomplished for him and each one of us. Our neighbor needs to know the God of mercy, who forgives sins, who promises heaven, who wants a loving relationship with each one of us. We need to live our life together as witnesses to the world, witnessing to everyone that Jesus is the God of mercy, who forgives our sins, those we commit against Him and those we commit against our neighbor; that we can forgive our neighbor of the sins he commits against us. We need to share with our neighbor the riches of baptism, the grace, mercy and peace of Jesus which now saves us.

In looking down we will also see who God really is. For who God really is, is not the distant deity who merely gazes on us from His throne in heaven as we wallow in our pit of despair. He is the God who came down from heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary, who joins Himself to us and we to each other in a loving relationship and communion. God not only has eyes for the lowly; He shares the flesh and blood of the lowly, He becomes one with us. The Most High is one and the same with us, the Most Low.

And tonight, on this Maundy Thursday, this “Command” Thursday, we remember the command of Jesus to “‘Eat and drink of it all of you’ and to ‘Do this eating and drinking in remembrance of Me.’” On this night of betrayal Jesus, the Son of God, washes His disciples feet, reminding us of Jesus command to “Love our neighbor as ourselves.” The fingers that made heaven and earth now scrub the scum from between man’s toes. The hands that brilliantly painted every sunset and landscape wash feet painted with the filth of dirt and sweat. The One before whom all angels bow gets on His knees to labor as a servant for those whom He loves, His disciples and all people.

And in so doing Jesus gives us a humble revelation of who He is. He is the God who makes His glory visible in the lowliness of servant hood. Jesus is the God who is so poor that He must be born in a stable and laid in a manger. Jesus is so poor that he must borrow a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. Jesus is the God who slaves away at washing the disciples’ feet. He is the God who gives his cheek to the betraying kiss and lying lips of Judas, the slapping hand of the High Priest, and the spit of the Sanhedrin. Jesus is the God who gives His head to the thorns, His hands and feet to the spikes, His side to the spear. Jesus is the God who embraces rejection, shame, torture, and death; for you and for me and for all people. With these events that shape Jesus’ earthly ministry we do not ask ourselves “What Would Jesus Do” but “What Has Jesus Done For Us and What Does He Continue To Do To Us And For Us”. This is what shapes our “Life Together” with Jesus and with our neighbor. It is God at work within us, to Him be the glory. Like Him we are servants of God and neighbor. Like Jesus we are bound to each other in love, living a life together as servants, humbling ourselves for the greater good .

Jesus does all of this for each one of us, because that is who God is. Jesus is the God who is love. And because Jesus is love He loves us by giving Himself and all that He is and has to us. For God so loved the world that He gave...and what He gives us is nothing less than Himself.

Jesus not only washes our feet; He washes us completely clean, body and soul, through the waters of Holy Baptism. Jesus fills the font with the water from His side and kneels there to wash the

dirt and sweat of our sin away from us. Jesus not only gives His body to the executioner and His blood to the dust beneath Him; He gives His body and blood into our mouths to eat and to drink, to be shaped and recreated in His image. We are transformed, changed from a lowly son of the dust to an adopted son of God Most High. The bread we eat and the blood that we drink in Our Lord's Supper, which is His holy precious body and blood transforms us into what it is; we are one with God. We, the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, are just that, holy and righteous in God's sight, because of Jesus, because of the body and blood that He shed, that is now in us, strengthening us, keeping us. When we eat and drink Jesus in the Sacrament this evening we are assuming Jesus' rightful place on the Father's heavenly throne. Having been joined to Jesus, as we do tonight and every time we gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ, He lifts up and out of the sin, the death and the power of the devil, that so envelopes us and leaves us for dead. We are given a new seat, at the Father's right hand. For we are children of God, brothers and sisters with Christ, heirs of heaven, guests at the great banquet feast. Truly, in Jesus, we lack no good thing, our cup runs over.

So together we come and eat. Together we come and drink. Together we come to the lowly God who has joined us, who are the lowliest, to Himself who is the Highest; that we can share that exaltation, that good thing, with our neighbor. Come to the altar that Jesus would exalt us and lift us up to sit at the place of the Most High, the throne of God in heaven. And pray that we would be strengthened to do the same for our neighbor. Amen.