

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2026

As we experience the first day of the Triduum, I am reminded of the last of our Lenten Talks. Dean Keith warned us of multiple feelings and contrary ones too, with so much going on in the unfolding narrative of scripture. Together, we are invited again to follow the last days of Jesus and his preparation for his own execution.

There are many different strands to what we are hearing and re-enacting tonight: the scandal of foot washing, the inspiring sacramental Passover meal we now know as the Last Supper, and then that loneliest of Gethsemane moments when he is deserted by his closest followers who could not stay awake in this time of trial.

Tonight we are being asked to do just that, anytime up to 11pm: to reflect and pray before the Blessed Sacrament, to give thanks and embrace what one writer has called the 'Sacrament of the Present Moment' - when we remember the suffering of the fragile world we now inhabit and perhaps individuals and friends we know who, although going through dark or difficult times, are still loved by God.

There is an intimacy and irony about Christ still praying alongside us as our rock and refuge in all our times of doubt or sorrow. However many times we have fled from him or felt he has walked away from us, tonight's sacramental presence of Christ with us, is all the more poignant.

In another memorable Lent talk by our new Bishop, I had no idea that she had co-written a book, 'Who do you say I am?'

based around these days of Holy Week. Through meditation, poetry, prayer, and art we are encouraged to use different stimuli and resources: to see in these days not so much tragedy, as hopefulness, and a deeper understanding of Christ serving us and encouraging us to serve others.

Tonight we are supporting St Elizabeth Hospice and for the wonderful example of sacrifice and care which that place embodies. Of course there so many other charities and causes like the Samaritans, or Papyrus, providing support by trained volunteers, for those who are disturbed or suicidal, many of them giving up huge amounts of their time every week. They are what Mother Teresa called 'doing something beautiful for God'. And it is that title of a poem, 'Beautiful', which Adam Atkinson has written in Bishop Joanne's book, that I wanted to share with you on this night in particular:

"The hour was not at Cana. Water there
Was poured and given to the guests as wine.
This washing as a slave, he deigns to share
The loving as an act more than a sign.
He said the hour was coming at the Well,
The woman given water for her thirst.
This sating is a story we may tell
Again, of that the end is not the worst.
But now the hour is here. His robe aside,
With cleansing water, caring for my needs,
As preparation. Loving of his bride
In loving words and gifts and loving deeds.
Down, down the mountain runs the water sweet

To carry and to kiss beautiful feet.”

Now I am sure that all those kind volunteer feet offered tonight do not feel this to be their owner’s most beautiful attribute! They do a job which helps us to walk and to run but that’s not the point is it? It is Christ serving us so intimately which so often makes us draw back; we are embarrassed; we give our excuses. But the bride of which the poem speaks is surely the Church, a living Church today whose foundation stone will forever be, Christ, the One giving us springs of living water: to comfort us, heal us, refresh us, and revive us.

Much is made in this year’s Lent Book that the act of foot washing is not for men only! Liz Dodd is particularly nostalgic in reminding us that in 2013 Pope Francis was the first pope to wash women’s feet during a Holy Thursday liturgy, ministering to two women inmates at a youth detention centre near Rome. It shocked traditionalists but by 2016, was made licit by him within mainstream church practice. In 2024 Francis washed *only* women’s feet, at a Rome prison, from his wheelchair.

I quote: “On this, the final evening of his earthly ministry, Jesus turned a boisterous mealtime into a revolutionary space, where women were honoured as equals and no one was untouchable. Jesus’ act of love and service breaks taboos, particularly around cultural norms of touch and taint. I like to think (says Sr Liz) he got the idea from Mary, his friend from Bethany, who welcomed him home, bruised and exhausted after flipping tables in the Temple, and washed his

feet with her hair.” The sacrament of the present moment is very much here and now, for all of us in St Mary’s. AMEN.