

“O these heavy, heavy words” John 13

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. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not 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, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:1-17)

Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, 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 have love for one another."

This is such a famous event. Jesus and His disciples. The last evening together. The last meal together. So much was going on. Today we'll try to focus only on the last words from our reading.

“A new commandment I give to you, 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 have love for one another.”

What a wonderful words! Right? Yes, or no? Think carefully. It may seem that they are such a wonderful words, but let's see whether this first impression really can be justified.

Ask yourself, what kind of people do we love? What kind of people do we like? What kind of people we want as our friends? Think about it.

And on the other hand, what kind of people we don't like? What kind of people we don't want to love? What kind of people we don't want to have as our friends. Think about it. We'll get back to these questions after a little while.

Now let's look at this last evening which Jesus spent together with His disciples. Closer look can help us to reconsider what to make of this wonderful words 'love one another'.

What was going on that evening? It is interesting how John describes events of these last hours together. **"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"**.

Jesus knew what was going to happen. In just a few hours He will be arrested and dragged to His enemies. In John's gospel this phrase 'his hour' always refers to Jesus crucifixion. He knew it was coming.

But not only that. He also knew that **"the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God."** All things had been given into His hands.

What would you do if all things are given into your hands? What would you do? How would you use this kind of authority and power? We could do so much, so much...

But what did Jesus do? **"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"**. That's all He could come up. That seemed to be the most important thing for Jesus on that evening – to love His disciples till the end.

How did Jesus show His love? In quite an unusual way. **"He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."**

It doesn't make much sense to us. What a big deal to wash the feet of your buddies? Sure, it was nice to do it, but wasn't there another way to show His love? Probably there were other ways as well, but Jesus chose this one, for this one spoke volumes to His disciples and for any person at that time.

Why? It is rather simple. Washing of the feet was considered at that time to be the most demeaning task. It should have been a shock for the disciples when Jesus began to do it. We can see it from Peter's reaction.

‘Are you going to wash my feet?! Never! By no means!’ Only slaves were expected to wash someone's feet. Not even all slaves. If you were Jew and happened to have a Jewish slave, he was not expected to do it.

Disciples were supposed to serve their Masters, their teachers in all possible ways, to do for them everything. Except – washing the feet. We have quite a lot of descriptions of washing of the feet in Jesus time, but never... never... never there was a situation, when a master, a teacher would wash disciples' feet.

What doesn't make much sense for us, was shocking for Jesus disciples. Their Master and their Lord suddenly humiliated Himself undertaking this unimaginable task – washing their feet. He literary make Himself like their slave.

Jesus showed His love to the end. He showed that there was nothing He would not do for the sake of His disciples. And the next day He will give up His life for them. Sure, at that moment they didn't get it.

But as Jesus Himself said, they will understand it later. After His resurrection. And that was not simply a man washing feet of another men, that was the Son of God, God in flesh showing His love to His fallen and rebellious creatures.

Now think about the wonderful words of Jesus. **“Just as I have loved you, you also are to 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 have love for one another.”**

I don't know about you, but these wonderful words of Jesus make me feel very, very uncomfortable. How can I possible keep this new commandment? How could I possible love someone as Jesus has loved me?

We could try to find a way around saying, yes, but Jesus loved the apostles, those holy men, founders of the church. Even this excuse will not work. Think about the disciples of Jesus. How holy they were, really?

John and James. Bothers. What were they thinking, what were they dreaming about? About power and fame. They were those who were hoping to sit at the right and at the left hand of Jesus.

Think about Peter. Brave and quick to speak. ‘If needed I'll die with you!’ Just a few hours later.. all his bravado will be gone. ‘I don't know this man, just leave me alone. I don't know Him.’

Matthew, the tax collector. Tax collectors were despised by all. For they were greedy, selfish, going against their own people and serving their oppressors. Judas, the thief. By that time he already had decided to betray Jesus. Holy men? Really?

Remember, Jesus was God, He knew everything. He knew the hearts of these men. He knew their every thought and desire. And you think that He did what He did for them because they were such a nice people? If you think so, think again.

God is not like us. This we need to remember. God is not like us at all. Jesus didn't come to find a nice people whom He could love, whose company He could enjoy, no, He came to save ... who? ... saints? ...no! Sinners. He came to save the lost.

His disciples, which we know as His apostles were as much sinners as anyone else in this world. God doesn't seek for good people. God seeks for everyone who recognizes that we need Him. He seeks for you. For each of you.

For every single person in this world. Not because we are so good. No, but because we need Him so much. We need God's love. You need God's love. Everyone needs Jesus' love.

Let's go back to these wonderful words of Jesus. "Love one another". I'll ask you once more, - what kind of people do we love, what kind of people we want to have as our friends? People we like, people who like us.

Now answer this, - what a big deal if you love someone whom you like and who likes you and maybe loves you? What a big deal? Is there anything specifically Christian in it? No, not at all.

Most people love those who love them and care for those who care for them. That's why Jesus said: **"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"** (Mat 5:46)

How would this kind of love show others that we are Jesus' disciples? How? There is no answer. For this is not what Jesus expects from us as His disciples. He expects us to love one another in a way He loves us.

That is, He expects us to love those, who don't deserve our love, who don't deserve love at all. For they need it the most. That's a very difficult task. Very difficult. That's why these wonderful words of Jesus, for us, sinners, are not wonderful at all. They demand of us something we are not capable of on our own.

There is a simple principle – you can't give what you have not received first. In this case, you can't love others in a way Jesus loved His disciples if you haven't been loved this way first.

And this is exactly how it works with Jesus. He never, never... do you hear it! - He never asks you to do things first. He is always first loving you. Hear it, please, He always, always loves you first!

That was His love that changed His disciples, this strange and sinful bunch into twelve apostles. That was His love that has changed millions and millions of lives, for they were loved even if they didn't deserve it.

Jesus undeserved love changed them. Millions of Christians. That was Jesus love that enable them to love those who didn't deserve their love. To love enemies, to love outcast, to love broken and fallen people. To love those, to whom Jesus love was so needed.

Remember, God always, always loves you first. Before you were born He created you parents to give you live. He has sustained and provided everything you need for your life.

For most of us, before you were even conscious about what was going on, He already adopted you in His family through the Holy Baptism. He calls, and educates and sends pastors to speak to you on His behalf. He does all of this for you, and He does it first.

Before the world was created, the Son of God knew what He will do for you. That He will give up His life to save you. He did it a long time before you were even born, and He did it to show you His love.

On that last evening, Jesus did something else. He knew that these words 'love one anohter' are heavy for us. He knew we'll need His help, His love, even more, that we'll need His presence to be able to follow them.

So He arranged it for us. On that everning Jesus gave you a gift. His Holy Meal, where He Himself is present to show you His love, to the end. Where He Himself is present to strengthen and restore you, to protect you for all evil, and to give you true joy and peace, to pour over you His Holy Spirit.

I know it is not easy to love those who are not lovable. When we struggle to do it, we need to remember that we have this Helper, who loved us first. Who loves us first, who desires to speak to us His love so that we are changed.

When it is difficult to keep Jesus words, come and receive His help! Come and listen to His words as He speaks His love to you. His undeserved love. Come and receive as much as you need. There is no shortage of love with this God.

Every time when you come to receive the Lord's Supper, remember, this is Jesus love, love with which He loves you first, with which He loves you till to the end, and nothing is going to change it. Amen.