

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Maundy Thursday  
April 9, 2020  
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On Maundy Thursday, the preparations made during the day are given scant notice in our liturgical observance. That is because the focus of the liturgy on this day is on the events which took place at the Last Supper that evening: the institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood, and the example of loving service. But during the day, when Jewish housewives were removing the yeast from their homes according to the law, for keeping the Passover, Our Lord Jesus was making *His own plans* for His last meal. If the Gospel is not just a chronological recording of facts but is indeed *saving* history, then there is a reason we are given some details of these preparations. The reason is something in the Lord's instructions can be used by us as a model, and to emulate, in our own discipleship.

Our Lord Jesus gave strange and cryptic directions: "He sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, 'go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him.'" (*Mark 14:13*) Can you image being told to go into Franklin Street in Boston on a rainy weekday, or Wall Street in New York, or LaSalle Street in Chicago, and look for a man in a business suit carrying an umbrella? *Everybody* is wearing a business suit and carrying an umbrella! Jerusalem was like that on the eve of the Passover. There were no business suits and umbrellas. But houses were being washed clean. There would be many men bearing pitchers of water. The city would be a beehive of activity.

The two disciples did not question their Master. They went into the city as instructed. You and I are also invited at first to simply obey the precepts of the Church and our conscience in all our affairs. The Blessed Lord can and does build on that. We do not wait to be prayerful before we begin to pray. We do not wait for the spirit of charity to begin acting charitably. We begin with the sense of duty, and later on come to understand it all fits together and makes sense.

Then there is the *other* disciple. On the morning of Maundy Thursday, the servant with the pitcher of water shows us in a wonderful way the importance of a single little duty. Our Lord had apparently arranged for the Last Supper with a cloak-and-dagger effort. The location of the evening meal would not be discernable in advance to Judas or to anyone else. The Last Supper could not, *and must not*, be stopped. This servant with the water pitcher could have defied his Master's

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instructions. He could have stopped to gossip; he could have visited his girlfriend; he could have done his own Passover shopping. In these ways he might have missed his encounter with Peter and John in the busy city. But the servant with the water pitcher was faithful, and in no small way he played a part in providing the quiet and serene setting of the Last Supper. And we do not even know his name! Everything worked as the Lord planned, and Jesus was able to institute the Mass, the Priesthood, give an example of Divine love, and speak that priceless address recorded in St John's Gospel and known as the "High-priestly Prayer."

The two disciples on their planning trip into the city, and the servant with the water pitcher, are reminders that you and I begin to follow Jesus by accepting the small instructions and the lowest place. But those are opportunities to fulfill the obligations and duties of Catholic faith and practice. And where those obligations are performed in the spirit of loving obedience, Jesus Christ is never betrayed.