

Herald Cafe



A DRIVE THROUGH HISTORY



DONG VALLEY: WITNESSING THE FIRST SUNRISE OF INDIA

Maundy Thursday: More than a meal, a message of service



By Malvino Alfonso

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, marks the beginning of the most sacred days in the Church—the Easter Triduum. On this special evening, we remember three deeply meaningful moments from the life of Jesus, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Commandment of Love, expressed through the washing of the disciples' feet and the Institution of the Priesthood. These events, which took place on the night before Jesus' crucifixion, are central to our faith and continue to shape how we live and worship today.

THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE: WASHING OF THE FEET

The word 'Maundy' comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning 'command.' It refers to the command Jesus gave His disciples that night: "Love one another as I have loved you." One of the most powerful ways Jesus expressed this was by washing their feet—a task usually done by servants. This humble act shocked the disciples and taught them (and us) that true love means service.

Historically, the washing of the feet was introduced into the Roman liturgy in the 12th century, first practised in monasteries as a gesture of humility. It became part of the Holy Thursday liturgy, originally done after the Mass, but today it follows the homily. Though optional, many communities still include it as a moving sign of Christ-like service. The ritual is based on John 13:1–15, where Jesus washes the feet of His disciples and commands them to do likewise.



HOT CROSS BUNS: A LOCAL TRADITION IN GOA

In many Goan parishes, hot cross buns are distributed on Holy Thursday. Traditionally, they are given to the twelve representing the Apostles during the Washing of the Feet. Some parishes give one bun per family, symbolizing unity in the Last Supper, while smaller parishes may offer them to all attendees, making the celebration more inclusive.

THE LAST SUPPER AND THE EUCHARIST

At the heart of Holy Thursday is the Last Supper, where Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. During the meal, He instituted something new—the Eucharist—saying, "This is My Body... this is My Blood... do this in memory of Me." With these words, He gave us a living memorial of His sacrifice.



Since the early Church, Christians have gathered to break bread in remembrance of Christ. Before 1955, this Mass was held in the morning, followed by daytime adoration. After reforms by Pope Pius XII, it was moved to the evening to reflect the timing of the Last Supper and adoration until midnight.

CHANGE TO THE WASHING OF THE FEET RITUAL:

In January 2016, Pope Francis issued a decree through the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which changed the Roman Missal's instructions regarding the Washing of the Feet. Previously, the rubric specified that the feet of "viri selecti" ("chosen men") were to be washed. The updated rule allows the priest to wash the feet of "a group of the faithful", which can include women, children, and the elderly or sick.

THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTHOOD:

Holy Thursday also marks the Institution of the Priesthood. When Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me," He entrusted His apostles with the mission to continue His work, especially through the Eucharist—a moment seen as the beginning of Holy Orders.

SYMBOLS OF SILENCE AND SURRENDER:

After the Gloria, church bells and instruments fall silent until the Easter Vigil—a 9th-century tradition symbolizing mourning, known as the "fast of the ears." The Blessed Sacrament is then taken in procession to a side altar for adoration, recalling Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. This "Holy Sepulcher" devotion ends at midnight. The Mass ends in silence,

and the altar is stripped, reflecting Jesus' suffering and preparing us for Good Friday. In remembering Maundy Thursday, we are invited not only to reflect but to live the values Jesus embodied—love, humility, sacrifice, and service. These timeless lessons continue to guide us as individuals and as a community of faith, reminding us that true discipleship begins at the feet of others.

POPE FRANCIS' PRACTICE:

Even before the 2016 change, Pope Francis began the tradition in 2013, just weeks after becoming pope. He celebrated Holy Thursday Mass in a juvenile detention centre and washed the feet of 12 young people, including two girls and two Muslims.

He has continued this practice every year in various settings such as: prisons, refugee shelters, homes for the elderly, facilities for the disabled. His actions emphasize inclusion, mercy, and the universality of Christ's love.



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