

Sounds of Worship

Maundy Thursday

Today marks the start of the Holy Triduum, the three-part liturgy which leads us through the sorrows of Passiontide to the resurrection Joy of Easter Eve.

The Sounds of Worship on Palm Sunday are ones of regal power and authority, Maundy Thursday is subdued and intimate. I imagine the disciples convening for the last supper with a mixture of elation arising from the popular response to Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem represented by Palm Sunday and trepidation about what might happen next.

Jesus sets the tone with a quiet meal at which he reverses the notions of kingship by washing the feet of his disciples and celebrating his own sacrifice in the breaking of bread and sharing of the wine.

I had chosen to play before the service a Chorale prelude by J S Bach, "O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig" BWV 618. Based on the words of the Agnus Dei, this German Chorale would normally be used on Good Friday but Bach's setting of the music sets the intimate mood of the Maundy Thursday service perfectly. You will hear the choral melody soloed in the pedal part but less noticeably Bach incorporates the same melody set at a different pitch and delayed by two beats in the middle of the texture, a so-called musical canon. At one level this may seem like a clever musical trick but being Bach, there is a symbolic meaning too. Bach uses the chorale melody in canon, so that the two strands of the same melody, albeit with some counterpoint surrounding it, underpin and bind the music together. Thus, a single, simple theme is lies at the core of his music and in the same way that belief in redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God is the essence of faith.



Figure 1 "O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig" BWV618 J S Bach (Click the arrow-head, and when the video opens click the next arrow-head to start it)

The first Hymn on Maundy Thursday is "An upper room did our Lord prepare" AM165 written by Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000). It is set to the tune O Waly Waly



Figure 2 Setting of the Tune O Waly Waly

1. An upper room did our Lord prepare
For those He loved until the end:
and His disciples still gather there
To celebrate their Risen Friend.
2. A lasting gift Jesus gave his own:
To share His bread, his loving cup

- Whatever burdens may bow us down,
He by His cross shall lift us up.
3. And after supper He washed their feet,
For service, too, is sacrament.
In him our joy shall be made complete-
Sent out to serve, as he was sent.
 4. No end there is! We depart in peace.
He loves beyond our uttermost:
In every room in our Father's house
he will be there, as Lord and Host.

This hymn has a strong narrative theme to it as it describes the key elements of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. There are also interesting references in the last verse first to Candelmas (we depart in peace, references Simeon's words of the Nunc Dimittis) and secondly to John 14.2 (In every room in our Father's house). It is set to the Tune O Waly Waly which is a folk song of Scottish origin, based on lyrics that partly date to the 1600s. Over the years it was also set to English words. It was collected by Cecil Sharp who published it in *Folk Songs From Somerset* (1906). The simple structure and calmness of the melody help to set the tone of the service.

In previous years the choir has sung the Motet "Ave Verum" by Mozart as an anthem on Maundy Thursday. Mozart composed this piece in 1791 in the middle of writing his opera *Die Zauberflöte*. He wrote it while visiting his wife Constanze, who was pregnant with their sixth child staying in the spa Baden bei Wien. Mozart set the 14th century Eucharistic words "Ave Verum Corpus". He wrote the motet for Anton Stoll, a friend of his. Stoll was the musical director of the parish St. Stephan. The setting was composed to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi; the score is dated 17 June 1791. (The Feast of Corpus Christi falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, and in 1791 was observed on June 23.) The composition is only forty-six bars long and is scored for choir, string instruments, and organ.

The motet was composed less than six months before Mozart's death. During his final months he began work on his Requiem. While the Requiem is a dramatic composition, the motet expresses the Eucharist thoughts with simple means, suited for the church choir in a small town.



Figure 3 "Ave Verum Corpus" W A Mozart

The Maundy Thursday service concludes with the singing of "Now my tongue, the mystery telling" which was written in the thirteenth century by St Thomas Aquinas (c1225-1274). It was originally written for the feast of Corpus Christi (like the Mozart) but is appropriately transferrable to Maundy Thursday. The words were translated into English by Edward Caswall (1814-1878) and John Mason Neale (1818-1866) (See All Glory laud and honour). We continue to use the plainsong music for this hymn. The hymn recounts the birth of Jesus, his life of discipleship and the last supper. At the Maundy service we sing this hymn in procession and by leaving a gap between verse 4 and 5, as appropriate, the processional party have returned to the chancel and everyone sings the final two verses from a kneeling position. A simple gesture but powerfully reinforces the theme of the hymn. The simple plainsong melody, Pange Lingua, completes the calm and intimacy of the service.



Figure 4 Pange Lingua

1. Now, my tongue, the mystery telling
of the glorious Body sing,
and the blood, all price excelling,
which the gentiles' Lord and King,
in a Virgin's womb once dwelling,
shed for this world's ransoming.
2. Given for us, and condescending,
to be born for us below,
he, with men in converse blending,
dwelt the seed of truth to sow,
till he closed with wondrous ending
his most patient life of woe.
3. That last night, at supper lying,
'mid the twelve, his chosen band,
Jesus, with the law complying,
keeps the feast its rites demand;
then, more precious food supplying,
gives himself with his own hand.
4. Word-made-flesh, true bread he maketh
by his word his Flesh to be;
wine his Blood; which whoso taketh
must from carnal thoughts be free;
faith alone, though sight forsaketh,
shows true hearts the mystery.
5. Therefore we, before him bending,
this great Sacrament revere;
types and shadows have their ending,
for the newer rite is here;
faith, our outward sense befriending,
makes our inward vision clear.
6. Glory let us give, and blessing
to the Father, and the Son,
honour, might and praise addressing,
while eternal ages run;
ever too his love confessing,
who from both with both is One. Amen