

MAUNDY THURSDAY

by Hamish Hendry

There is another day in Holy Week that has old and interesting ceremonies connected with it. This is Maundy Thursday, which always falls, of course, on the day before Good Friday. It is the day which is set apart to commemorate the humility and tender loving-kindness of Jesus during that week of his suffering and death. You remember that, after the Master with his disciples, had partaken of supper in that upper room in Jerusalem, He rose up and laid aside his garments. Then He took a towel and girded himself. After that He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. In this beautiful act of humility you have the origin of Maundy Thursday; and its odd name is derived from the circumstance that, in the Ancient Church, the anthem *Maudatum novum* was sung at the ceremony.

For the Early Church consecrated this day to acts of lowliness in imitation of Christ. The washing in public of the feet of the poor became the outward sign of humility in the whole church. In later times this washing was accompanied by gifts, and the ceremony was performed by Kings and Queens. Thus we find, here in England, that Queen Elizabeth performed the ceremony at her palace of Greenwich. The age of Her Majesty being thirty-nine, there were thirty-nine poor people chosen to assemble in her presence on Maundy Thursday. Then the yeomen of the laundry, the sub-almoner, and finally the Queen herself, washed each foot of the poor people in water mixed with sweet herbs, marked the sign of the cross above the toes, and then kissed it. Afterwards various gifts were distributed to these poor people in clothes, food, and money. Since James II. no English monarch has performed this ceremony, but in Spain and Austria the yearly foot-washing upon Holy Thursday is still performed by the Head of the State.

In England the giving of gifts on Maundy Thursday has taken the place of foot-washing. During the reign of George II. the old men and women who gathered in the Banqueting House, at Whitehall, received half-quartern loaves, boiled beef and mutton, herrings red and white, with small bowls of ale. They were also given shoes and stockings, cloth to make dresses, and a leathern bag filled with money. The money was in silver-pieces, of the value of a penny and upwards; and these coins being made at the Mint for this special purpose were called Maundy Money. During the Reign of Queen Victoria the giving of meat and clothes was discontinued, but the poor people still received their dole or maund.

It is to be hoped that King Edward VII. will continue this practice for—unlike some of the old customs—it is well worthy of being continued. Most people are inclined to be proud, and when people are proud they are usually greedy and selfish. Therefore, it is a good thing to have at least one day in the year set apart to help us to remember that true greatness, the greatness which Jesus Christ expects from his disciples, is only to be attained by lowliness and unselfishness.

Source:

Hendry, Hamish, E.F. Mason. "Maundy Thursday." *Holidays & Happy Days*. London: Grant Richards, 1901. 43 – 45. Electronic.