

# Sermon for Maundy Thursday

*'Go, prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.'*

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Over two thousand years ago, there was an empire, known as the Carthaginians. They were a mercantile people. They made their living on trade, and they, in the most literal sense, worshipped Mammon, the god of gold. Their worship was the worship of worldly success. In order to ensure their financial prosperity, they would sacrifice their children, just born from their mothers, to Molech, the god often execrated and derided in the Old Testament. The god of earthly prosperity; of abundance, of money. Even this day, thousands of pieces of pottery can be dug up from the earth of the lands of their imperium containing the skeletons of innocent children, their flesh burned away by the brazen fire of the ancient altars of this most fiscally responsible deity.

Long ago, they made war against Rome in order to secure for themselves the trade routes of the Mediterranean, that they might command all the economy of the region. The Romans were unlike the Carthaginians. They did not worship Mammon. They looked not to money. They worshipped Venus, the goddess of love and family, and with her Vesta, the goddess of the home and hearth; which is to say, the goddess of the kitchen.

To the Roman, nothing, no power, no success, no achievement, no wealth, was more important than the family, and the food which fed that family. [A most Italian trait.]

For over a hundred years, the Carthaginians made war against the Romans: the people of world and wealth against the people of famine and family.

The Romans found everything about the Carthaginians abhorrent: their love of money; their love of luxury; but most of all, their sacrifice of their own family for the sake of material gain. Therefore, in the Roman senate, year after year, decade after decade, speech upon speech, whether on the topic of taxes or on

agricultural reform or on the building of new temples would all end their addresses with this simple phrase: '*Carthago delenda est.*' 'Carthage must be destroyed.'

We too are enslaved to this Carthaginian god. This Mammon, who takes into bondage our every thought to worldly anxiety, nervousness, ambition, and in the failure of ambition, depression, sorrow, even suicide. Yet we sacrifice all to him. For we are thralls, slaves to this god, who sometimes calls himself Mammon; sometimes calls himself power; sometimes calls himself success; who first called himself a serpent; who we know to call Satan.

Our Lord, the True God, Blessed be His Everlasting Name, was born of the virgin Mary into the guardianship of Joseph. He descended not a grown man from heaven, but was born a child to the holy family, that He might become the God of families.

He grew *in wisdom and in stature*, speaking as *one with authority*, laying His blessed hands upon those who were sick, that they might be made whole; pronouncing words of promise, that children might be brought back from the brink of death; crying sacred tears, that His friends might be resurrected from the dead. A God who knew no wealth, no security, no comfort; only compassion, and sadness; holy is He.

When Rome was once again at war against the child-murdering Carthaginians, A Roman commoner took upon himself his ancestral armor and helmet and spear. In tears did his wife prepare for him upon the family hearth his last meal before he departed, and as he left, she embraced him; his only reply: 'Carthage must be destroyed.'

So it is that, *when the hour of his glorification had come*, that is, of Christ's crucifixion, His final conflict, Our Lord's apostles, His Church, His bride and wife, prepared for Him a Passover meal. And as He was about to be betrayed, He said:

*"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to*

*them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'*

And this He did, that He might become the God of the hearth.

So we gather, week upon week, with family and with friends, who are but family by adoption, to eat a great feast of our Lord. Venus and Vesta have kissed one another: the god of family and the god of feast are now seen to be one: the single God Jesus Christ, who through the banquet of His body and blood has made us all brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, a glorious family, royal, radiant and invincible, a thousand ages old, and to reign for endless ages to come. The *unknown god* made known in the Flesh of the Son; the pantheon of pagan religion given truth in the countless brethren of Jesus, born of His blood.

After numerous wars, the Romans, having had their lands ravaged by the worshippers of Mammon, having generations of their men slaughtered by Carthaginian spears, who generation upon generation prayed for the destruction of the infanticidal Carthaginians, finally invaded their ancient foe's lands, captured and sacked Carthage, their capital city, decimated its population, and salted its fields, that no living thing would there again dwell.

See then, the Roman civilian soldier, bearing his armor upon his body, and sword in hand, returning, after decades of warfare, to his wife and children; to the hallowed lands of their ancestral farm, to his home and hearth, to his family and kin, and being embraced by his beloved tear-strewn spouse, pulling the bronze helmet from his head, and after centuries of blood-rained war, saying to her, in calm, and in consolation, 'Carthage has been destroyed.'

Our Lord prepares a meal before us; His last meal with His family, His Church, for tonight He gives Himself up to be captured, the calm of His sacred face gazing in compassion upon the hateful countenance of the violence of the capturing soldiers. He must go to the cross. He must go to hades, the capital of that idol, that false god of many faces; this Mammon, this serpent, this Satan. He is not drug down into hell. He descends, for it is an invasion; for He is a legion of one man, bearing the flag of God, bearing the standard of humanity, all within His naked flesh. He descends.

And when He returns on the Sunday of His Resurrection, on the Feast we call Easter, we shall meet here again, and come again to this altar. And as a man of war returning from a long campaign against our age old enemy, the tyrant of mankind, He shall recline at this table, and with pierced hands and slashed body give to us, His brothers and sisters, this bread and wine, the feast of His own being, and speak to us, in calm, and in consolation, saying:

'Hell has been destroyed.'

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon texts: Exodus*

*12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; Luke 22:7-20*