

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Holy Thursday

*Holy Thursday*

*March 29, 2018*

When I was about ten years old, my grandparents celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. Grandma and Grandpa were very sociable and were blessed with a lot of good friends, so, naturally, a big celebration was planned— first, with a Mass at their local parish, St. Anthony's, and then, with a formal dinner at a local restaurant.

Things have changed a lot over the years, but, back then, I was a picky eater. White Castles and Twinkies were great but fine food and dining were another matter. Looking at the array of food that was spread for this grand occasion, I blanched. To their great embarrassment, Mom and Dad couldn't get me to eat a thing. "You don't know what you're missing," said my Dad in plaintive tones. Mom, for her part, didn't waste time negotiating with me. "If you don't eat now," she said, "you won't get anything when we get home!" But I was unmoved. That night I went to bed hungry.

Sad to say, the ten year old version of myself is something of a symbol for far too many Catholics in our local Church and throughout our country. Many who otherwise have healthy appetites are "picky eaters" when it comes to the Holy Eucharist. Many of our fellow Catholics no longer turn to the Mass, the Eucharist, as the source of their spiritual nourishment . . . they go about spiritually hungry. What my Dad once said of me could be said of them: "They don't know what they're missing!"

The reasons why people are absent from Sunday Mass vary. Some believe they find adequate spiritual nourishment elsewhere – in popular forms of spirituality, in evangelists who preach the gospel of prosperity, in Christian self-help programs or even in New Age spirituality. Others feel that they receive enough inner nourishment from their family, friends, work and leisure. Perhaps they are a little like I was, way back when: I truly believed that fast food was better than good food. And sometimes I still do!

Still other people will say that, when they *do* come to Mass, they aren't "fed". In other words, the homily is boring, the singing and music are mediocre, the congregation is unengaged . . . even the flowers on the altar are wilting. And, of course, no one in Church leadership should be satisfied with that. Pope Francis often speaks and writes about effective preaching. Pope Benedict wrote about the art of celebrating the liturgy well. Everyone knows that parishes flourish when the preaching is good, the celebration of the Eucharist is reverent and joyful, and the parishioners are engaged in ministry, especially to the poor.

Yet, celebrating the liturgy well – important as that is – is not the whole story. We can attend a most beautifully staged and celebrated Mass and be wowed by its pageantry and emotion... yet not really enter into the heart of the sacred mystery unfolding before our eyes. Or we can walk away from a less-than-glorious celebration of the Mass, and decry its threadbare qualities . . . without realizing what we have just witnessed.

Holy Thursday, the day when we commemorate the Last Supper – the institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood – Holy Thursday is a good day for us to remind ourselves what the Eucharist is really all about, whether it is celebrated in a grand cathedral or a humble chapel.

It is the Lord himself who is our teacher. Nothing in Scripture leads us to believe that the Last Supper was celebrated with outward opulence and grandeur. Its inward beauty shines forth when Jesus, who is master, teacher, and Lord, kneels before his disciples and washes their feet. Fully aware of his divinity and his mission, Jesus humbled himself before the disciples, doing something that was normally the work of servants.

In performing this symbolic act, Jesus teaches us three things at once: First, he points to the humiliation of the Cross by which he will give his life for us in love, to save us from our sins. Second, the washing of the feet is a symbol of Baptism by which we are thoroughly cleansed by the power of the Cross. And third, Jesus' act of humble service is a paradigm, a model, for our lives. We are to love and serve others as Jesus did, especially the poor and vulnerable.

So it is that we refer to Jesus' washing of feet as the "Mandatum" – the mandate –

the new law of love, namely, to love others, to show mercy, as God has first loved us.

At table with his disciples for the Passover meal, Jesus again reveals to them the beauty and depth of his love. Jesus celebrates with them the deliverance of God's people from the slavery of Egypt, but he does so as the One who will bring about a most profound deliverance. For the next day, on the Cross, it is Jesus Himself who will be the Sacrificial Lamb. He, the Lamb of God, will deliver humanity from the slavery of sin and death. He, the Lamb of God will lead any and all who accept this deliverance into the freedom and joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

As he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and said, "This is my Body that is for you" ...and as he took wine as said, "This is the new covenant in my blood" ...Jesus "encapsulated" his Presence and his Sacrificial Love in the bread and wine he totally transformed into Himself by those very words. Then he added: "Do this in memory of me!" - in other words, do *this* as *the* way of perpetuating until the end of time my living Presence and the One Sacrifice of Redemption I will offer on Calvary. This is the heart and soul of every Mass... this the sacrificial meal set before us... whether Mass is celebrated with great solemnity or utter simplicity.

With the eyes of faith, let us peer into the inner beauty of every Mass as we gaze upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Let us meditate on the Eucharist daily, so we will never take it for granted or come to think that any other form of spiritual nourishment compares with it or come to think that, in the end, we can do without this great mystery of love that connects us to Jesus, that causes him to live in us and among us, enables us to forgive and be forgiven, and gives us the wherewithal to live the law of love, to love others in daily life as God first loved us!

We, your priests, trace our priesthood to this night also, for in instituting the Eucharist Jesus also instituted the ministerial priesthood... (which is why prayer before the Eucharist is so essential in raising up vocations to the priesthood). As Jesus knelt before his disciples, so we should serve you, our people, with devotion. As Jesus was the Word of God in the flesh, so too we should preach the Word in season and out of season, and not only with words but also with our example. As Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, so too we, your priests, should be humbled and awestruck every time we say: "This is my Body given for you!" "This is my

Blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” How this mystery should transform our lives and yours! How this mystery should impel us to share the Good News with others and invite those who no longer practice their faith to return the altar of the Lord.

This night we come together as one, priests and people, around the table of the Lord. Let us come not only with a renewed and deepened appreciation but indeed with genuine praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who loves us more than we could ever ask or imagine, as together we say: “O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine!”