

Holy Thursday - Mass of the Lord's Supper

I. Introduction: The Upper Room

In this beautiful Cathedral we may feel like a tiny flock yet we are here the friends of Christ. By taking part in this liturgy of Holy Thursday we enter the Upper Room where Christ gathered with his Apostles for the Last Supper.

Here our eyes of faith see the Lord doing three things. First, he institutes the Eucharist, the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Second, he institutes the Holy Priesthood so that his saving words and deeds might be perpetuated until the end of time. Third, he washes the feet of his Apostles giving us an example of that charity which is at the very heart of the Eucharist and the Priesthood.

II. The Eucharist

Yet, as we stand, so to speak, at the threshold of the Upper Room, we need to take stock of ourselves. We know only too well that many Catholics have decided not to go to Mass any more, claiming that they "don't get anything out of it". Perhaps we have been distracted or unenthusiastic at Mass. On this Holy Thursday, in the midst of this Year of Faith, how we need to deepen our faith in the Eucharistic Lord.

If we respond to the Lord's invitation to join him and his Apostles in the Upper Room, we can indeed re-discover, as if for the first time, the depth of his love so readily available to us every time the Eucharist is celebrated. Once we truly encounter this love, we will never take the Mass for granted.

Jesus shows us this love in a humble gesture. He puts on an apron, washes his disciples' feet, and dries them with a towel. This manifests what is in his heart, an attitude of self-giving love, a love for his Father in heaven and a love for us that was total and complete.

When Jesus began to wash the feet of his disciples, Peter objected. The disciples themselves were amazed. We too should be amazed at the depth of the Lord's merciful love. Could it be that God's own Son became man and then knelt before

twelve simple men to wash their feet? One of these men would betray him and all but one would abandon him yet he still proceeded to wash their feet . . . This act of love would open the disciples' eyes to what Jesus did when he instituted the Eucharist. It should open our eyes to what happens whenever the Mass is celebrated.

III. What Happens in the Eucharist

In every Eucharist we encounter the true presence of Christ. It is as if Christ comes to us with basin and towel to wash us clean - to wash the dust and grime of daily living that accumulates not on our shoes but in our souls, in our heart of hearts. And the cleansing agent employed by Jesus is no longer ordinary water but rather the blood and water that flowed from his side as he hung upon Cross and gave himself into his Father's hands. He comes to us in love, not because we have always been faithful, but because he is 'the Father's faithful witness'. Indeed sin is always in some sense a betrayal of Christ and absenting ourselves from Sunday Eucharist is a way of abandoning our relationship with him and with His Body the Church.

Nonetheless, in his mercy, the Lord Jesus bends down to wash us clean. Renewing the grace of Baptism and the forgiveness received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we admit our need for forgiveness at the beginning of each Mass pleading that Christ might intercede on our behalf before the Father.

And having cleansed us of sin, Jesus imparts to us the bread which has been changed in his Body, his Body offered for us on the altar of the Cross; He imparts to us the wine which has been changed into His Blood, his Blood poured out for the salvation of the world. Not only is Jesus present in our hearts and in our memories, Jesus is really, truly, & substantially present under the appearance of bread & wine— a Presence that is utterly personal and powerful to save us. The One who sacrificed himself out of love for the Father and out love for us becomes our food and drink, he becomes our life, our strength, our joy.

IV. Not a Dim Memory

In his love for us Jesus ensured that what took place at the Last Supper and at Calvary would not become a dim memory but instead extend its full reality to the end of time. And he did this by instituting the Holy Priesthood and conferring it upon

the Apostles, with three simple words: "Do this in memory of me!"

If this is a night for us all to rediscover the beauty and power of the Eucharist, it is also a night for every priest to give thanks for undeserved gift of his vocation. I never cease to be amazed that the Lord called me to be a priest, unworthy as I am. I rejoice even as I rely on the Lord's grace and mercy, to serve as an instrument through which his presence and saving power is transmitted to those I have been sent to serve. With my brother priests here present and throughout the Archdiocese, we ask this night for the grace to dedicate our lives to service of the Lord and the Church, especially to those in most need of God's grace.

V. Charity

And what is the consequence of all this for our lives? What really should this Holy Thursday night liturgy mean for you and me? Surely it means that loving the Lord means loving the Eucharist in which the Lord gives himself to us in such a completely generous way. Surely it means living the priesthood in a completely generous way.

And for us all it means living in a completely generous way by embracing Christ's self-giving love, contained in communicated in the Eucharist. The Eucharist, the 'source & summit of our lives,' is where we attain the grace and strength to make our own lives a gift of love – a gift that we give not only to our families and loved ones but also to many others, including those who are not our friends, those who are in great need, and those who may be inimical to the faith we profess. The Eucharist we celebrate both calls and enables us to love others with the same love which Christ lavishes upon us.

VI. Conclusion

After reenacting the washing of the feet and celebrating the Eucharistic mystery, we shall move from the Upper Room to accompany Christ in his Agony in the Garden. Let us draw close to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. Let us prepare to take up our Cross and walk the whole way to Calvary and stand with the beloved disciple and the Mother of God beneath the Cross as Jesus lays down his life for our salvation.

If we do so we shall never take the Mass for granted but instead will return again

and again to the Eucharist there to draw our life, our strength, and our hope. May God bless us and keep us always in His love!