



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 8 April 2004

1. "*He loved them to the end*" (Jn 13: 1).

Before celebrating the last Passover with his disciples, Jesus *washed their feet*. With an act that was normally done by a servant, he wanted to impress upon the Apostles' minds a sense of what was about to take place.

Indeed, *his passion and death* constitute the fundamental *loving service* through which the Son of God set humanity free from sin. At the same time, Christ's passion and death reveal the profound meaning of the new commandment that he entrusted to the Apostles: "*even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (Jn 13: 34).

2. "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (I Cor 11: 24, 25), he said twice as he distributed the bread that had become his Body and the wine that had become his Blood. "*I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*" (Jn 13: 15), he had said a little earlier after washing the Apostles' feet. Christians, therefore, know that they must "remember" their Teacher by the reciprocal charitable service of "washing one another's feet". In particular, they know that they should remember Jesus by reliving the "memorial" of the Supper with the bread and wine consecrated by the minister who repeats over them the words which Christ spoke on that occasion.

This is what began to shape the Christian community from the outset, as we have heard Paul testify: "*As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (I Cor 11: 26).

3. *The Eucharist is therefore the memorial in the full sense*: the bread and the wine, through the action of the Holy Spirit, truly become the Body and Blood of Christ, who gives himself to be the food of men and women on their earthly pilgrimage.

The same *logic of love* presides at the Incarnation of the Word in Mary's womb, and at his becoming present in the Eucharist. It is "*agape*", *charity*, love in its beautiful, pure sense. Jesus insistently asked his disciples *to abide in this love of his* (cf. Jn 15: 9).

To stay faithful to this mandate, to abide in him like branches joined to the vine and to love as he loved, it is necessary to be nourished with his Body and his Blood. In telling the Apostles: "*Do this in memory of me*", the Lord bound the Church to the living memorial of his Passover. Although he was the only Priest of the New Covenant, he wanted and needed to have human beings who, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, would act in intimate union with him by distributing the food of life.

4. Therefore, while we fix our gaze on Christ who institutes the Eucharist, we become newly aware of the importance of priests in the Church and of their bond with the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the [*Letter*](#) I wrote to Priests for this Holy Thursday, I wanted to repeat that *the gift and mystery* is the Sacrament of the Altar, the gift and mystery is the Priesthood, and that both sprang from the Heart of Christ during the Last Supper.

Only a Church in love with the Eucharist *brings forth, in turn, many holy priestly vocations*. And she does so through *prayer* and the *witness of holiness*, offered especially for the new generations.

5. At the school of Mary, "*the woman of the Eucharist*", let us adore Jesus truly present in the humble signs of the bread and the wine. Let us implore him never to cease calling priests after his own Heart to the service of the Altar.

Let us ask the Lord never to let the People of God lack the Bread that sustains them throughout the earthly pilgrimage. May the Blessed Virgin help us rediscover with wonder that the whole of Christian life is linked to the *mysterium fidei* which we are celebrating solemnly this evening.

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