

## Homily for Holy Thursday; Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

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Images are important to us! I have a very pleasant childhood memory of my grandparent's modest home. It had a very small first floor hallway, and as you looked down the hall, into the bedroom...there hung a picture of Jesus. This is an image of Jesus I think most of us are familiar with...the one entitled the "**Head of Christ.**" This is the same image of Our Lord that was on display in my home when I was growing up. In fact, that same portrait is on the same wall in mother's house now. That image of Our Lord will remain in my memory forever.

Tonight, we're given other important images. In our first reading we learn how the Jewish people prepare the Passover. It must be a one year old unblemished male, either a sheep or a goat, slaughtered during the evening twilight, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The Apostles knew these instructions well, because *prior to this night*, God's covenant with His People was represented by the Passover Lamb...sacrificed on the altar.

But, at this meal...the Last Supper...the Lamb being offered is Christ Himself. He tells us; *this is*, "...**the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant.**"  
(Mark 14: 24) And His Body is the meal which we share with each other when He says, "**Take this and eat.**" (Mt 26:26)

This evening Our Lord anticipates the events of the next day on the hill of Calvary, the very offering of Himself to His Father as the Sacrificial Lamb. The *new and everlasting* Covenant...the Covenant which *will never be broken.*

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This is the night Jesus first gives Himself to us in the Eucharist, not for His own sake...but for ours...He knows we cannot live without Him. We need Him in the Eucharist to strengthen us in our weakness, comfort us in our loneliness and pave the pathway to Eternal Life. And on this night He gave His Apostles...***and their successors***...His Bishops and His Priests...the authority to renew and make that Sacrifice of 2,000 years ago present on this Altar, and Altars all across the world, until the end of time when He commands, “***Do this in memory of Me.***” (Eucharistic Prayers)

On this evening when God gives us His perfect gift of the Eucharist, He also gave us the gift of the Priesthood, those whom He invites to be *in persona Christi*. During the Mass, our priests ***do more*** than make an offering ‘*in the name of Christ.*’ They ***do more*** than make an offering... ‘*in the place of Christ.*’ Our priests, at the altar, ***become the person of Christ.*** ...And, as we share in the graces which flow from Christ, through His Priests, we also share in their responsibilities.

We’re called to bear the burden with our priests, but how? Our Lord gives us that gift this evening as well; when **John** tells us... “*He rose from supper, took off His outer garments, took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples’...*” (John 13: 4-5) He then said, if, “***I...the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.***” (John 13: 14-15)

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During these last moments just *before the horror* of His Passion and Death were about to begin, Our Lord was on His knees, washing the feet of His Disciples; purifying them, removing the dust and dirt and grime of the day. Perhaps He did this in anticipation of the roads that lie ahead, preparing them “...*to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded...*”<sup>(Matt: 28:19-20)</sup> Perhaps he was giving another *perfect representation* of the priesthood, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation where we humbly come before Our Lord, again in the person of the priest, bringing the debris that clings to each of us; our *failings*...our *weakness*...and our *sins*...being *truly sorry*...*asking for forgiveness*. *It is there* our sins are washed away, *it is there* we are cleansed, and this is why He said to Peter “*Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance in me.*”<sup>(John 13:8)</sup>

Imagine...God...down on His knees...so that we might have a model to follow, and then He tells us, “*Love one another as I have loved you!*”<sup>(John 15:12)</sup>

Perhaps this evening is our opportunity, to ask ourselves how we are doing with that... “*Have I loved as Christ loves?*”...“*Whose feet have I washed?*” Maybe even more importantly we should ask ourselves, “*Whose feet should I have washed, but did not?*” When we have an understanding of washing the feet of others, “...*we have become a people called to conversion. It is (only) then that we know God has taken possession of our hearts...!*”<sup>(The Three Days of Pascha; by Nathan Mitchell)</sup>

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Perhaps, like me, we all have images of Our Lord forever etched in our memory. Hold on to them! But tonight, we're given a beautiful image; ***Christ, on His knees***, doing the work of a servant, in ***humility*** and in ***charity***. And that is what Our Lord leaves with us this evening... ***His love for us!*** He demonstrates this love for us in His gift of the ***Eucharist***; He shows us His love in His gift of the ***Priesthood***. And He proves His love for us, so that we, like His Apostles, have a model to follow...and when we do...***we also will have an inheritance in Him.***

Our Holy Father Emeritus, Benedict XVI summarized this so well in his encyclical, ***God is Love***, when he wrote; “*Love for widows and orphans, prisoners, the sick and the needy of every kind is as essential to her (the Church) as the ministry of the Sacraments and the preaching of the Gospel.*” Listen to that again...loving our neighbor – washing their feet, *if you will* – is ***as essential*** to the Church as the ***ministry of the Sacraments*** and the ***preaching of the Gospel.***”

And that's the image of Our Lord I would like us to remember... ***Christ on His knees, washing feet.*** That's the model He gives us this evening...that's the image I hope others have of each of us... “***Loving one another, as He, has loved us!***” (John 15:12)