



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 17 April 2003

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

On the eve of his passion and death, the Lord Jesus wanted to gather his Apostles around him once again to entrust his last instructions to them and to give them the supreme witness of his love.

Let us also enter the *"large upper room furnished and ready"* (Mk 14: 15), and dispose ourselves to listen to the most intimate thoughts that he wants to confide to us; in particular, let us be ready to receive the *act* and the *gift* that he has prepared in view of this final meeting.

2. So, while they are eating, Jesus rises from the table and begins *to wash the disciples' feet*. At first Peter resists, then he understands and accepts. We too are asked to understand: *the first thing* the disciple must do is to prepare himself to listen to the Lord, opening his heart to *accept the initiative of his love*. Only then will he be invited, in turn, to do what the Teacher did. He too must be committed to "washing the feet" of his brothers and sisters, expressing in gestures of mutual service that love which is the synthesis of the whole Gospel (cf. Jn 13: 1-20).

Also during the Supper, knowing that his "hour" had now come, Jesus blesses and *breaks the bread*, then gives it to the Apostles saying: *"This is my body"*; he does the same with *the cup*: *"This is my blood"*. And he commands them: *"Do this in remembrance of me"* (I Cor 11: 24.25). Truly this is the witness of love taken "to the end" (Jn 13: 1). Jesus gives himself as food to his disciples to become one with them. Once again the "lesson" emerges that we must learn: *the first thing* to do is to *open our hearts to welcoming the love of Christ*. It is his initiative: it is his love that enables us, in turn, to love our brethren.

Therefore, the washing of the feet and the sacrament of the Eucharist: *two expressions of one and the same mystery of love* entrusted to the disciples, so that, Jesus says, "*as I have done... so also must you do*" (Jn 13: 15).

3. "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (I Cor 11: 24) The "remembrance" the Lord left us that evening encompasses *the crowning moment of his earthly existence*, the moment of his sacrificial offering to the Father out of love for humanity. It is the "remembrance" that is placed in the context of a supper, the paschal meal, in which Jesus gives himself to his Apostles under the appearances of bread and wine, as their nourishment on the journey to the heavenly homeland.

Mysterium fidei! This is what the celebrant proclaims after saying the words of the consecration. And the liturgical assembly responds, joyfully expressing its faith and adherence filled with hope. The Eucharist is a truly great mystery! A mystery "incomprehensible" to the human mind, but so full of light to the eyes of faith! The Table of the Lord in the simplicity of the Eucharistic symbols - the shared bread and wine - are also revealed as the *table of concrete brotherhood*. The message that radiates from them is too clear to be missed: those who take part in the Eucharistic Celebration *cannot remain impervious* to the expectations of the poor and needy.

4. It is precisely in this prospective that I would like *the collection* taken during this Celebration to go to alleviate the *urgent needs of all those in Iraq who are suffering* the consequences of the war. A heart that has known the love of the Lord opens spontaneously to charity for his brethren. "*O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus sumitur*".

We are all invited this evening, until well on into the night, to celebrate and adore the Lord who made himself food for us pilgrims in time, offering to us his flesh and his blood.

The Eucharist *is a great gift for the Church and for the world*. To ensure that ever deeper attention be paid to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, I wanted to offer the entire Community of believers *an Encyclical*, whose central theme is the Eucharistic Mystery: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. I will shortly have the joy of signing it during this Celebration that commemorates the Last Supper, when Jesus gave himself to us as the supreme testimony of love. From this moment I entrust it in the first place to priests, so that, in turn, they may disseminate it for the benefit of the entire Christian people.

5. *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas!* We adore you, O wonderful Sacrament of the presence of the One who loved his own "to the end". We thank you, O Lord, who edifies, gathers together and gives life to the Church.

O divine Eucharist, flame of Christ's love that burns on the altar of the world, make the Church, comforted by you, ever more caring in wiping away the tears of the suffering and in sustaining the efforts of all who yearn for justice and peace.

And you, Mary, "Eucharistic" Woman who offered your virginal womb for the incarnation of the Word of God, *help us to live the Eucharistic Mystery in the spirit of the "Magnificat"*. May our lives be a never-ending praise of the Almighty who concealed himself beneath the humility of the Eucharistic signs.

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas...

Adoro te... adiuva me!

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