



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 28 March 2002

1. *"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1).*

These words from the Gospel text just proclaimed clearly underline the climate of Holy Thursday. They give us an insight into what Christ felt *"on the night when he was betrayed"* (1 Cor 11:23), and they inspire us to take part with intense and personal gratitude in the solemn rite we are celebrating.

This evening we begin Christ's Passover, constituting the tragic and concluding moment, long prepared and awaited, of the earthly existence of the Word of God. Jesus came among us not to be served but to serve, and he took upon himself the vicissitudes and hopes of the people of all time. Mystically anticipating the sacrifice of the Cross, in the Upper Room it was his wish to stay with us under the appearances of bread and wine, and he entrusted to the Apostles and their successors the mission and power to perpetuate the living and efficacious memory of that event in the Eucharist.

This celebration thus mystically involves all of us and introduces us into the Sacred Triduum, during which we too shall learn from the one "Master and Lord" to "stretch out our hands" and go to wherever we are called to fulfil the will of our heavenly Father.

2. *"Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:24,25).* With this command, which commits us to repeating his gesture, Jesus concludes the institution of the Sacrament of the Altar. As he finishes the washing of the feet, he again invites us to imitate him: *"For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15).* In this way he establishes an intimate connection between the Eucharist, the sacrament of his sacrificial gift, and the commandment of love which commits us to welcoming and serving our brothers and sisters.

Partaking of the Lord's table cannot be separated from the duty of loving our neighbour. Each time we partake in the Eucharist, we too say our "Amen" before the Body and Blood of the Lord. In doing so we commit ourselves to doing what

Christ has done, to "washing the feet" of our brothers and sisters, becoming a real and visible image of the One who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil 2:7*).

Love is the most precious legacy which Christ leaves to those whom he calls to follow him. It is his love, shared by his disciples, which this evening is offered to all humanity.

3. *"Any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself"* (1 Cor 11:29). The Eucharist is a great gift, but also a great responsibility for those who receive it. Before Peter, who is reluctant to have his feet washed, Jesus insists on the need to be unsullied in order to take part in the sacrificial banquet of the Eucharist.

The Church's tradition has always stressed the link between the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I too have wished to reaffirm this in my [Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday](#) this year, by inviting priests above all to consider with renewed wonder the beauty of the Sacrament of forgiveness. Only in this way will they be able to help the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care to rediscover the Sacrament.

The Sacrament of Penance restores to the baptized the divine grace lost by mortal sin, and disposes them to receive the Eucharist worthily. Furthermore, in the direct conversation which its ordinary celebration involves, the Sacrament can meet the need for personal communication, which has become more and more difficult nowadays as a result of the frenetic pace of our technological society. Through his enlightened and patient action, the confessor can bring the penitent into that profound communion with Christ which the Sacrament restores and which the Eucharist brings to full fruition.

May the rediscovery of the Sacrament of Reconciliation help all the faithful to draw near with respect and devotion to the Table of the Lord's Body and Blood.

4. *"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (Jn 13:1).

Let us return in spirit to the Upper Room! Here we recollect ourselves in faith around the Altar of the Lord, as we commemorate the Last Supper. Repeat the gestures of Christ, we proclaim that his death has redeemed humanity from sin and continues to reveal the hope of a future of salvation for the men and women of every time and place.

Priests are called to perpetuate the rite which, under the appearances of bread and wine, makes present the sacrifice of Christ, truly, really and substantially, until the end of time. All Christians are called to become humble and attentive servants of their brothers and sisters, in order to cooperate in their salvation. It is the task of every believer to proclaim through his or her life that the Son of God loved his own "to the end". This evening, in a silence charged with mystery, our faith is nourished.

In union with the whole Church, we proclaim your death, O Lord. Filled with gratitude, we taste already the joy of your resurrection. Full of trust, we commit ourselves to living in expectation of your return in glory. Today and for ever, O Christ, our Redeemer. Amen!

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