

4.9.20 – Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper

The liturgies of the Paschal Triduum are some of the most powerful and moving ceremonies that we celebrate as Catholics. Part of that power comes from the uniqueness of these liturgies. During these three days, we have rites that are not celebrated at any other time during the year: the procession and the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, the blessing of the new fire and the Easter candle at the Easter Vigil, and, in the Mass of the Lord's Supper that we celebrate this evening, the washing of the feet. These rich signs of our faith only happen during the solemn celebration of the Lord's Passion and death and resurrection.

And so, there is pain in our hearts that during this Sacred Triduum we must be separated from each other—socially distanced, as we now say. There is a pain in our hearts that most of these powerful rituals will be omitted this year because of a lack of a congregation and out of concern for the transmission of disease. Yet, even though these rituals are absent, their deep meaning will never be taken from our hearts.

In the gospel, St. John described the humble gift that Jesus offered to His disciples on the night of the Last Supper. The Master took on the role of a slave. The Creator knelt down to wash the feet of His creatures. Jesus humbled Himself to show His great love for His disciples and to give them an example of they are to love one another.

This example was not directed only to the twelve, but to every follower of the Lord. Every person who claims the name Christian is called to follow in the path of our Master and Teacher. We are called to the service of charity – to love in a way that is willing to humble ourselves for the sake of our beloved – to love in a way that cause us to lower ourselves so that the beloved may be exalted. The washing of the feet is a vivid testimony to this kind of selfless and self-sacrificial love, but it is not the most vivid example.

Less than 24 hours after the Lord had lowered Himself to wash the feet of His disciples, Jesus would be raised up in pain and agony upon that terrible cross. In that moment of self-sacrifice, we see the greatest love: One who would lay down His life for His friends.

This, too, is a model for us in the way that we are to love as Christians. Our love for one another cannot stop at washing feet, our love must even embrace the cross. Loving as Jesus loves means both serving one another and being willing to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of another.

When we love as Jesus loves, we nail to the cross our own needs and desires so that our sacrifice may give life to someone else. This kind of Christian love is being displayed for us daily in the midst of this pandemic. How many health care workers and first responders sacrifice their own needs, their own health in order to care for those who are suffering!

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How many clergymen and consecrated persons have risked their health and given their lives to provide for the spiritual needs of those who are suffering! How many people have answered the call to serve, to sacrifice, to love in the face of such suffering! This kind of selfless sacrifice is the Christian love to which we are called by our baptism. This is what it means to love as Jesus loves.

And it is in this kind of generous love where we find the true joy of being a disciple of Jesus. It is in laying down our own lives for the sake of another that we find the true life that Christ has promised us. “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

This is the promise of the One who gives to us the gift of the Eucharist. He took bread, made of wheat that had been ground, and transformed it into His True Body. He took wine, made of grapes that had been crushed, and transformed it into His True Blood. This True Body and Blood now strengthen us – even if you can only receive spiritually – it strengthens you to become the very Love that you receive in the Eucharist.

As we offer this Mass of the Lord’s Supper let us rejoice in the presence of Jesus who remains with us and who strengthens us with His grace. May we become that grain of wheat that dies with Christ and that is buried in the ground with Him so that, in rising again, we may produce the fruit of true charity and love.