

April 6, 2023

7:00 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Holy Thursday: Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

This beautiful Mass of Holy Thursday launches us into the next 3 holy and sacred days that we know as the **Sacred Triduum**. With each gathering of God's Faithful People, over the course of these next 3 days, we will commemorate every aspect of the account of Jesus' Act of Salvation for all humanity through His suffering, Death, Burial and Resurrection. We will also celebrate each aspect of our Faith that is essential to our lives as Catholic Christians, faithful followers of Christ our Saving Lord.

During this Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, we give thanks for the three precious Gifts that Jesus gave us: 1) through the institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, extending to His Apostles and all their successors, the authority to be His priests and to "Do in memory of Me" what He did at the Last Supper. And that is what leads to 2) the precious Gift of the Holy Eucharist, Jesus' own Body and Blood which He gave us to be our spiritual Food and Drink to sustain us on our Journey of Faith. And the Eucharist is given to strengthen us so that we can follow Jesus' example through His calling to us all: 3) to live our lives as "servants" in the example of the *"One Who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

The Gospel passage we just heard from St. John's account of the Last Supper doesn't tell us anything about the institution of the Eucharist because St. John powerfully placed that account in his entire sixth chapter of his Gospel. St. John's focus on Jesus at the Last Supper is solely on the reason why Jesus gave us the Eucharist in the first place: to strengthen/nourish us spiritually so that we can do what He did. That's why Jesus washed His Apostles' feet, and that's why He asked them: *"Do you realize what I have done for you?"* He then went on to explain to them----and to us----If Jesus, our Teacher and our Lord, has washed others' feet, then we too must do the same. And since washing other people's feet is not easy, or always pleasant, then we need Jesus' help, thru the power of the Eucharist, to strengthen us to do what Jesus did.

When we stop and think about Jesus' Life and Ministry, it's His act of pouring Himself out in sacrificial love that resulted in our Salvation. That's what Jesus did on the Cross---the ultimate act of self-sacrificing Love. And that's what Jesus wants us to understand---that we must do the same.

I'm sure we all remember the account of the mother of James and John coming up to Jesus earlier in His ministry, with the request that her sons sit at His right and His left. And what was Jesus' response? *"You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?"* (Mt.20:20-28) And then He went on to instruct them all: *"Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

"Drinking of the Chalice" in the Scriptures is always code for being willing to endure suffering in the cause of what is right and just. So, that's the question for each of us: can we drink the chalice? Whatever our "chalice" is, whether small daily sacrifices or life-changing sacrifices, we are being asked to do what Jesus did: to pour ourselves out in loving service. The only way we can do that is to humble ourselves to follow the Will of the Father. That's why Jesus said frequently, and in just a few hours, in the Garden of Gethsemane He would say it again with anguish several times: *"Father, take this chalice away from Me; but not my will but Yours be done"*. Since the Father did not see fit to "take that chalice" away from Him, Jesus was committed to "drink from the chalice", no matter what that would mean. And so must we.

Therefore, we need to see that the Eucharist is both meal AND sacrifice. If we focus on one (the meal) to the exclusion of the other (sacrifice), we lose the uniqueness and sacredness of the Gift of the Eucharist as Jesus intended. There can be no com-munion without sacrifice, and there can be no Eucharistic Table without it also being an Altar. That's what we heard in this evening's Responsorial Psalm: *"Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ"*. The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving, which occurs every time the Eucharistic Meal is celebrated, makes our intimate communion with the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, a reality that is stronger than sin and death. By His wounds, and by the Blood that poured forth from them, we are healed from the wounds of our own sins and with God's grace, able to do God's will.

God wants our sacrifice when it comes from a heart that is truly in communion with Him. In the course of time in the Old Covenant, God said that He had become “weary” of the ritual sacrifices of blood of bulls and goats. As God said through the Prophet Jeremiah: *“This is the covenant I will make in days to come.....I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people”*. (Jer.31:31-33) God wants our hearts---not just ritual sacrifices; He wants our “whole” hearts! So we need to be “renewed” --- to turn from sin and love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength! The covenant which God desired---“that the Law would be written on our hearts”----would be effected thru the Suffering Servant.

That’s what we will hear tomorrow on Good Friday----that’s what sets the stage for Jesus, the Lamb of God, Who came to take away the sins of the world. But His purpose is also to forge the covenant bond between God and His people. Since covenant and sacrifice are always linked, Jesus IS the link! Jesus IS the Law of God’s Love in the Flesh. And when we receive the Eucharist, and enter into com-munion with God and His People, that Law of God’s Love is written on our hearts. Jesus embodies the Covenant and IS the *“suffering Servant”*. Jesus’ plan was paradoxical in the extreme: He would destroy the power of sin and death, by taking on the sins of the world and dying! And just a few breaths before His death, Jesus asked the Father *“to forgive them for they know not what they do”*! That forgiveness is for sinners throughout history; it’s for you and me.

God the Father sent His Son into a world that had forsaken their faith in God, and into the midst of sin and death, not because He wanted His Son to suffer, but because He wanted His Son to bring the divine Light to the darkest places. It is not the Son’s suffering that pleases the Father, but the Son’s willing obedience in offering Himself in sacrifice in order to take away the sins of the world.

SO----that brings us back to the Words of Consecration: Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: *“Take this all of you and eat of it, for This is My Body which will be given up for you*. In a similar way, taking the chalice filled with the fruit of the vine, He gave thanks and gave the chalice to His disciples saying: *“Take this all of you and drink from it; for this is the Chalice of My Blood, the Blood of the New and Eternal covenant, which will be*

poured out for you and for Many for the forgiveness of Sins. Do this in memory of Me."

Our second Reading this evening(1 Cor.11:23–26) speaks eloquently about the transformation that occurs by the power of the Holy Spirit each time a priest prays these sacred words of consecration: *"Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."* As often as we do this, Christ is truly with us, and His Real Presence in this Blessed Sacrament is meant to change us. It is meant to transform us from the self-centered sinners that we are, into the selfless, strong women and men that we are called to be by God's Grace.

So, each and every time we come to Mass, we are coming, not only to celebrate Jesus' real Presence with us, and to receive Him into our hearts to be our spiritual nourishment---to keep us alive); BUT ALSO---to be our spiritual strength and give us the Divine Grace, to do what Jesus commands us to do----to pour ourselves out, sacrificially, in loving service to others. We can't do that on our own; we can only do so with God's Grace. When we do so, when we understand the Eucharist as the most precious Gift that Jesus could give to us, but also as an enduring mission to continue His saving Presence in our world through our acts of loving service, then we are celebrating the Eucharist worthily and as Jesus intends us to do. That's why Jesus shared with us the Parable of the Final Judgment, when the whole world will be separated into two groups, the Sheep and the Goats, and the sole criterion for inheriting the Kingdom or being banished from it would be whether we served those in need in the example and after the Heart of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Truly these are challenging days in which we're living. Today we are all keenly aware of the growing and strident divisiveness over abortion and all human life issues. In addition, we can easily be overwhelmed by the political and social issues that confront us, including racism, political divisions, inflation, wars in Ukraine and other parts of the world, the increased suffering of those most in need, and

all the economic problems that cause everyone so much fear and anxiety today. And yet, we are called to follow Christ, faithfully, joyfully and courageously. We can only do so if/when we are fortified by the Precious Gift of the Holy Eucharist.

Perhaps this beautiful quote from “*The Imitation of Christ*” by Thomas a Kempis (Book 2, # 1) sums up the challenge of what it means to “Do this in memory of Me.”: *Jesus today has many who love his heavenly kingdom, but few who carry his cross; many who yearn for comfort, few who long for distress. Plenty of people he finds to share his banquet, few to share his fast. Everyone desires to take part in his rejoicing, but few are willing to suffer anything for his sake. There are many that follow Jesus as far as the breaking of bread, few as far as drinking the cup of suffering; many that revere his miracles, few that follow him in the indignity of his cross; many that love Jesus as long as nothing runs counter to them; many that praise and bless him, as long as they receive some comfort from him; but should Jesus hide from them and leave them for a while, they fall to complaining or become deeply distressed.”*

Jesus invites us to join with Him regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist, both to be spiritually fed, but also to be continuously sent on our mission to bring His Love and His Word to others in our lives. May the Precious Gifts that we commemorate in a special way this evening truly be the Source and Summit of our Life in Christ and our Service to all God’s Holy People. So that *as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we may proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.*