

Homily for HOLY THURSDAY (April 17, 2025): EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Readings:-(Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15)

My dear brothers and Sisters in Christ

Today we are entering into the Easter Paschal Triduum. We celebrate three anniversaries on the Holy Thursday: 1) the anniversary of the first Holy Mass; 2) the anniversary of the institution of ministerial priesthood in order to perpetuate the Holy Mass, to convey God's forgiveness to repentant sinners, and to preach the Good News of salvation; 3) the anniversary of Jesus' promulgation of his new commandment of love: "*Love one another as I have loved you*" (Jn 13:34).

The Stole and the Towel is the title of a book, which sums up the message of the Italian bishop, Tony Bello, who died of cancer at the age of 58. On Maundy Thursday of 1993, while on his deathbed, he dictated a pastoral letter to the priests of his diocese. He called upon them to be bound by "*the stole and the towel*." The stole symbolizes union with Christ in the Eucharist, and the towel symbolizes union with humanity by service. The priest is called upon to be united with the Lord in the Eucharist and with the people as their servant. — Today we celebrate the institution of both the Eucharist and the priesthood: the feast of "*the stole and the towel*," the feast of love and service.

The Gospel explained. Today's Gospel describes how Jesus transformed the Jewish Passover into the Eucharistic celebration. First, he washed His Apostles' feet – a tender reminder of his undying affection for them. On Good Friday he will wash us again, in the humble flow of his own blood. Then he commanded them to "wash one-another's feet." This visual sermon reminds us that our vocation is to take care of one another as Jesus always takes care of us. Finally, Jesus gave his apostles his own Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine, as Food and Drink for their souls, so that, as long as they lived, they'd never be without the comfort and strength of his presence. Thus, Jesus washed their feet, fed them, and then went out to die for them, and all of us with them.

This Gospel episode challenges us to become Christ for others –Christ the healer, Christ the compassionate and selfless brother, and Christ the humble "washer of feet." The Gospel Reading for today is not off the point or as out of place as it may appear, since the institution of the Eucharist isn't mentioned at all. But St. John in his Last Supper account also makes

no mention of the bread being Jesus' Body and the wine being his Blood, since his Eucharistic teaching fills Chapter Six in his Gospel. This Gospel pericope is actually in perfect harmony with the other two Scripture Readings, for Eucharist and loving service to others go together. There is obviously a clear and important link here between the two. We cannot choose one over the other. Just as we are nourished by the body and blood of Jesus, we are also called to nourish others materially and spiritually. Just as the Body of Jesus is broken up for us, we are also called to be broken up for others. Our Christian living is a seamless robe weaving together Gospel, liturgy, daily life, and personal interaction. There is something lacking if we are devout in our regular attendance at Mass, but our lives are lived individualistically and selfishly. There is also something lacking if we are totally committed to caring for others but never gather in community to remember, give thanks and break the bread together.

Important Messages for personal life and reflection: 1) We need to render humble service to others. Our celebration of the Eucharist requires that we wash one another's feet, *i.e.*, serve one another and revere Christ's presence in other persons. To **wash the feet** of others is to love them, especially when they don't deserve our love, and to do good for them, even when they don't return the favour. It is to consider others' needs to be as important as our own. It is to forgive others from the heart, even though they don't say, "*I'm sorry.*" It is to serve them, even when the task is unpleasant. It is to let others know we care when they feel downtrodden or burdened. It is to be generous with what we have. It is to turn the other cheek instead of retaliating when we're treated unfairly. It is to make adjustments in our plans in order to serve others' needs without expecting any reward. In doing and suffering all these things in this way, we love and serve Jesus Himself, as He has loved and served us and has taught us to do. (Mt 25:31-ff).

02)We need to show our unity in suffering. The Bread we eat is produced by the pounding of many grains of wheat, and the Wine we drink is the result of the crushing of many grapes. Both are thus symbols of unity through suffering. They invite us to help, console, support, and pray for others who suffer physical or mental illnesses.

03)We need to heed the warning: We need to make Holy Communion an occasion of Divine grace and blessing by receiving it worthily, rather than making it an occasion of desecration and sacrilege by receiving Jesus while we are in grave sin. That is why we pray three times before we receive

Communion, *"Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us,"* with the final "have mercy on us" replaced by *"grant us peace."* That is also the reason we pray the Centurion's prayer, *"Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed"* (Mt 8:8). And that is why the priest, just before he receives the consecrated Host, prays, *"May the Body of Christ keep me safe for eternal life,"* while, just before drinking from the Chalice, he prays, *"May the Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life."*

Additional Anecdotes:- (1) .) A president in servant's role: *"When I try to tell people what Ronald Reagan was like,"* says Peggy Noonan, former White House speechwriter, *"I tell them the bathroom story."* A few days after President Reagan had been shot, when he was able to get out of bed, he wasn't feeling well, so he went into the bathroom that connected to his room. He slapped some water on his face and some of the water slopped out of the sink. He got some paper towels and got down on the floor to clean it up. An aide went in to check on him, and found the president of the United States on his hands and knees on the cold tile floor, mopping up water with paper towels. *"Mr. President,"* the aide said, *"what are you doing? Let the nurse clean that up!"* And President Ronald Reagan said, *"Oh, no. I made that mess, and I'd hate for the nurse to have to clean it up."* [Pat Williams, *The Paradox of Power* (New York: Warner Faith, 2002).]

02)Get inspired by the Eucharist: A few months before he died in 1979, Bishop Fulton Sheen gave a television interview. The reporter asked, "Your Excellency, you have inspired millions. Who inspired you? Was it the Pope?" Bishop Sheen responded that it was not the Pope or a cardinal or another bishop or even a priest or nun. It was an eleven-year-old girl. He explained that when the Communists took over China in the late forties, they imprisoned a priest in his own rectory. Looking through the window, the priest saw the soldier enter the Church and break open the tabernacle, scattering the Blessed Sacrament on the floor. The priest knew the exact number of hosts in the tabernacle: thirty-two. Unnoticed by the soldiers, a young girl had been praying in the back of the church and she hid when they came in. That night the girl returned and spent an hour in prayer. She then entered the sanctuary, knelt and bent over to take one of the hosts on her tongue. The girl came back each night, spent an hour in prayer and received Jesus by picking up a sacred host with her tongue. The thirty-second night, after consuming the final host, she made an accidental sound awakening a guarding soldier. He ran after her and when he caught her,

he struck her with the rifle butt. The noise woke the priest, but too late. From his house he saw the girl die. — Bishop Sheen said that when he heard about this, it inspired him so much that he made a promise that he would spend one hour each day before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He always said that the power of his priesthood came from the Eucharist.- Get inspired by the Eucharist! (John Pichappilly in *The Table of the Word*).

03) Precious gift: We are all familiar with the situation of the little boy who wants to give his father a birthday present but does not have any money to buy one. His father, realizing his son is too young to be able to earn any money, slips him five bucks so that he can do some shopping the next time they are in town. The big day comes, and the little boy proudly presents his father with a beautifully-wrapped, birthday gift. He is so very happy and proud of himself. So is his father – proud and happy to have such a loving son. — God gave us his Son so that we could give him back as a gift and become once again His sons and daughters. Jesus Christ was placed in our hands so that we could have a gift, the best of gifts. During each Eucharistic celebration we give this precious gift back to God the Father. Today we celebrate the feast of the First Mass (Fr. Jack Dorsel).

04) “Gone, But Not for Cotton:” There is an absolutely terrible old joke about a bill collector in Georgia who knocked on the door of a client who lived out in a rural area. This client owed the bill collector’s company money. “*Is Fred home?*” he asked the woman who answered the door.” “*Sorry,*” the woman replied. “*Fred’s gone for cotton.*” The next day the collector tried again. “*Is Fred here today?*” “*No, sir,*” she said, “*I’m afraid Fred has gone for cotton.*” When he returned the third day, he said sarcastically, “*I suppose Fred is gone for cotton again?*” “*No,*” the woman answered solemnly, “*Fred died yesterday.*” Suspicious that he was being avoided, the bill collector decided to wait a week and check out the cemetery himself. Sure enough, there was poor Fred’s tombstone. On it was this inscription: “*Gone, But Not for Cotton.*” — That’s terrible, I know, but it is a reminder that tonight as we participate in the Lord’s Supper, proclaiming that Christ is neither gone nor forgotten. We assert our Faith that He is present, here with us, as we receive Holy Communion in remembrance of him.

The Big Triduum

Well tonight we start the BIG three, better known as the Triduum. We wash feet, break bread, embrace our crosses and kick open the tomb again to

the possibilities of a new life, an eternal life with our God so passionately in love with us. Here is a litany I found and will use on Easter. A blessed Easter for all of you.

“Lord of Easter promise, I live in Faith of the Resurrection, but such is the nature of my Faith, that so much of me remains entombed. Break open the tomb.”

Please respond “Break open the tomb” to each of these prayers.

Where I have buried my compassion: Break open the tomb.

Where I have buried my sense of mercy: Break open the tomb.

Where I have buried my sense of humanity: Break open the tomb.

Where I have buried my love for my Heavenly Father:

Break open the tomb.

Where I have buried my sense of joy: Break open the tomb.

Where I have buried my willingness to forgive: Break open the tomb.

Lord in you I have found a Saviour no grave can withstand.
Help me roll away this stone and find the miracle of a new life,
That I may live more fully in your grace.”

Can I hear the Church say AMEN?

Be witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ. Amen. (Fr. Stephen Humphrey