

**Mass of the Lord's Supper
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Holy Thursday, April 21, 2011**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you want to leave behind – some word or gesture – by which your family and friends would remember you?

Jesus must have thought of this. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus was “fully aware that He had come from God and was going to God, the Father who had handed everything over to Him.” He knew he was going to be killed. The opposition had grown throughout his ministry and the cleansing of the Temple was the last straw. So tonight at the Passover meal the atmosphere is tense, but he wants to help his disciples make some sense of his death. So he performs two actions and speaks words that will interpret his coming death.

St. John tells us that Jesus wanted to show how great his love for them was. So what does Jesus do? As He and the apostles gather for the Last Supper, Jesus rises, takes off His cloak, and kneels before each of them

to wash their feet like a slave. Peter resists. Peter wanted to share in the power of the Messiah and this gesture of Jesus was undermining his ambitions. But Jesus' action makes a break with such worldly behavior. He will tell them that he no longer calls them servants, but friends, and there is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. So Jesus' action points to his death.

Jesus' washing the feet of His friends is also an extravagant gesture of humility and service from the Master to His disciples. More than simply a sign of service, however, the washing of the feet is also a sign of the unifying love of Christ in the Eucharist, which leads to the second sign by which Jesus wishes to be remembered.

In the second action he takes bread in his hands and tells them, "This is my body"; and then, with the cup of wine, "This is my blood." He shares himself, body and blood, just as tomorrow he will give himself, body and blood, for us on the cross. His death with all its pain will be the revelation of how far God is willing to go in loving us. His disciples are called to do the same. His disciples are called to offer themselves for God's people. As they do so, they will know that Jesus is present with them.

These two gestures unite our Baptism and Confirmation with the Eucharist, evidence of Jesus' unending love for us, instituted at the Lord's Supper that we commemorate tonight. Both actions also end with a command. After washing their feet, Jesus commands His apostles, "What I have done, so you must do." After declaring that the bread and wine were His body and blood he commands them again, "Do this in memory of me." In this way, Jesus not only instituted the Holy Eucharist, but also the ministerial priesthood. All of this is connected to Christ's command for all of us to love one another as He has loved us. Thus, Holy Thursday is also sometimes called Maundy Thursday, from the Latin word, *mandatum*, or commandment.

Our liturgy tonight will conclude with carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession and placing it in the altar of reposion for our adoration of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. In his reflections on the Paschal Triduum given yesterday in his General Audience, Pope Benedict had some very poignant words about this adoration, which I quote as follows:

"Maundy Thursday, finally, is closed with Eucharistic Adoration, in memory of the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Leaving the

Cenacle, he withdrew to pray, alone, in the presence of his Father. At that moment of profound communion, the Gospels recount that Jesus experienced great anguish, such suffering that he sweat blood (cf. Matthew 26:38). Conscious of his imminent death on the cross, he felt great anguish and the closeness of death. In this situation an element is seen that is of great importance also for the whole Church. Jesus said to his own: Stay here and watch; and this call to vigilance refers in a precise way to this moment of anguish, of menace, in which the betrayer arrives, but it concerns the whole history of the Church. It is a permanent message for all times, because the somnolence [or sleepiness] of the disciples was not only the problem of that moment, but is the problem of the whole of history.

“The question is what this somnolence [or drowsiness] consists of, and what is the vigilance to which the Lord invites us.” Pope Benedict went on to say “that the disciples' somnolence in the course of history is a certain insensitivity of soul to the power of evil, an insensitivity to all the evil of the world. We do not want to let ourselves be too disturbed by these things, we want to forget them: We think that perhaps it is not so grave, and we forget. And it is not only insensitivity to evil; instead, we should be watching to do good, to struggle for the force of good. It is insensitivity to

God -- this is our real somnolence: this insensitivity to the presence of God that makes us insensitive also to evil. We do not listen to God -- it would bother us -- and so we do not listen, of course, to the force of evil either, and we stay on the path of our comfort."

The Holy Father continued, "The nocturnal adoration on Maundy Thursday, our being vigilant with the Lord, should be precisely the moment to make us reflect on the somnolence of the disciples, of Jesus' defenders, of the apostles, of ourselves, who do not see, we do not want to see all the force of evil, and we do not want to enter into his passion for the good, for the presence of God in the world, for the love of neighbor and of God."

So as we partake of the Lord's Supper we recall Jesus' actions of washing feet and sharing his body and blood with us. How can we respond to such love? By being vigilant to avoid evil and to do good, by imitating his actions and obeying his words - "Do this in memory of me."

May God give us this grace. Amen.