

**Homily for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper
April 17, 2014**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: in the year 1345 in the Polish village of Wawel, a group of thieves broke into a little church and stole a monstrance from the tabernacle which contained several consecrated hosts. The thieves soon realized that the monstrance was not made of pure gold so they decided to get rid of the item as it would be of no value to them. They therefore discarded the monstrance, along with the consecrated hosts, into a muddy marshland in the area. The priests of the area, concerned not such much about the monstrance, but rather the Eucharistic presence of the Lord in the consecrated hosts, set out to try to find the lost treasure.

When darkness fell, they had not been successful and were beginning to lose hope. Reports began to come in to the local bishop about mysterious flashes of light coming from the marshy area where the hosts had been discarded. The bishop personally led a procession into the marsh to investigate and they found the monstrance along with the hosts which

had remained intact and were found to be the source of the unusual lights. The people were joyful at the great miracle of the Eucharist that they had witnessed, a miracle which continues to be celebrated each year in the nearby city of Krakow.¹

This miracle is one of more than 120 documented Eucharistic miracles from throughout the world. All of these miracles, and indeed every miracle, is given by God “to witness to some truth or to testify to someone’s sanctity.”² In the case of the Eucharistic miracles, their purpose is to witness to the truth of the great gift of the Eucharist which, as the Church reminds us, is the “source and summit of the Christian life.”³

We gather this evening to celebrate the institution of this most blessed sacrament by our Lord on the night of the Last Supper. As He gathered with His apostles, He gave them the gift of His Body and Blood and then entrusted them with the authority to continue to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice until He comes again at the end of time. By doing this, He was ensuring that this gift would be available to His people in every age on their journey to the promised land of Heaven.

The joy of this sacred moment in the life of Christ’s ministry is surrounded by the sorrow of His coming Passion and death. Yet, as the

Lord Himself told His disciples, “it was for this purpose that I came to this hour” (John 12:27). We are reminded of the words that we heard on Christmas morning when we celebrated His birth, when St. John wrote: “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). The institution of the Eucharist on the eve of the darkness of the Passion is indeed a source of great light for us. It is also a reminder to us that, as we participate personally in the Passion through our own sufferings and challenges in life, the light of Christ given to us in the Eucharist can never be fully extinguished. The Eucharistic miracle of Wawel serves as a visible reminder of this truth and is therefore a fitting miracle to connect with our celebration.

Our liturgy this evening also draws our attention to another important element regarding the Eucharist. The Gospel for the Mass this evening comes from the Last Supper account according to St. John. Of all four Gospel writers, John is the only one who does not speak specifically about the institution of the Eucharist in his writing. We hear, rather, of the lesson that Jesus imparts to His apostles regarding Christian charity. He humbly washes the feet of each of them and then tells them: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do”

(John 13:15). By giving this instruction during the meal of the Last Supper, Jesus is inviting His disciples to see the connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the way that they are to live their lives. The Eucharist, as the greatest gift of His love, is to transform our hearts to want to give more generously of ourselves to those around us.

In a sermon preached on Easter Sunday, St. Augustine, one of the great doctors of the Church, said the following regarding our reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus: "If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive."⁴ What we receive is Christ who Himself is God, and as St. John tells us: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). What we therefore become in receiving the Eucharist is love, a love which is meant to be shared with others in imitation of Him whom we receive.

Understood from this perspective, John's omission of the account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is in no way meant to diminish its importance, but rather to show the necessary result of what the gift of the Eucharist should lead to in our lives. By letting the love of God, received in the Eucharist, flow through us in our care for others, we provide a light for others to see. When we leave the church after having received Holy Communion, we go to a world that is full of darkness. We

encounter people who are struggling with the crosses of life in the forms of physical suffering, emotional anguish, or spiritual desolation. They can be tempted to follow the example of Judas and give in to despair. We have the opportunity to bring them the light of Christ and so encourage them to have hope in the midst of their trials and to trust in faith that the God who loves them and has not abandoned them.

By being open to the grace we receive in the Eucharist, willing to share that love with others by being of service to them, we have the opportunity of being a part of a Eucharistic miracle of sorts. We should never underestimate how God is able to use us in miraculous ways to bring light back to those who feel consumed by darkness.

In a talk on his conversion to the Catholic faith, the famous author and speaker Scott Hahn recounts a story of how, when he was in high school, he stopped “on a whim” to visit a friend whom he had not seen in more than two years. He met his friend at the door as he was preparing to leave his house. After more than two hours of conversation, his friend confessed to Scott that he had just then been leaving the house to go and commit suicide. His visit, however, had stopped him from following through and his life was saved.⁵ This story serves as proof that by our

openness to being of service to others, to share the gift of God's love with them, miraculous things can and do happen, sometimes in ways that we may never see or fully understand.

As we celebrate this night on which the gift of the Eucharist was instituted for us, let us give thanks to God for sharing His love with us in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. May our reception of this great gift be a light to encourage us in the struggles that we face in our lives. May it also inspire us to renew our desire to follow the example that He has given us in the washing of the feet of His apostles, that we may redirect our focus to the needs of the least among us and share God's love with them through our works of charity. By doing this, we let ourselves be bright lights of His love, bringing Christ to a world that is full of darkness, giving hope for all to see that beyond the shadow of the Cross lies the glory of the Resurrection.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Eucharistic Miracle of Krakow*, from the Vatican International Exhibition of Church Approved Eucharistic Miracles of the World, www.therealpresence.org.

² Father John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, p. 352.

³ *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

⁴ St. Augustine, *Easter Sermon 227*.

⁵ Scott Hahn, *Why a Protestant Pastor Became Catholic*, Lighthouse Catholic Media.