

## **Homily for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper**

**March 29, 2018**

**The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

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

*I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you.*<sup>1</sup> Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, seminarians, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these words from the Gospel of Saint John set the tone for our Mass this evening. Tonight, the Church throughout the world begins the Paschal Triduum with the commemoration of the Last Supper. During this Mass of the Lord's Supper, we remember how our Lord showed His love by giving us three great gifts on the night He was betrayed: an example of loving service, the institution of the ministerial priesthood, and His Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine in the Blessed Sacrament. Our Mass this evening gives us a fitting opportunity to reflect on how these gifts draw us closer to Christ so that we might live as His disciples in the midst of the world today.

What is it exactly about this commandment that makes it new?

It is a new commandment because the reasons for it are new: the neighbor is one with Christ, the neighbor is the object of the special love of the Father. It is new because the Model is always current, and because it establishes a new relationship between men. And it is new, too, because the degree of its fulfilment is new: *as I have loved you*; because it is directed to new peoples, because it needs new hearts, because it lays the foundation of a new order, one which has been unknown heretofore. It is new because it always will result in freshness of approach between men, accustomed as they are to their egoism and routine.<sup>2</sup>

Soon, I will have the privilege of washing the feet of some of the seminarians of our diocese as we remember the actions our Lord in His washing the feet of His disciples. As we reflect on our Lord's actions, we would be remiss not to recognize the powerful example of humble service involved in His washing the feet of His disciples. In order that he might teach His disciples a lesson, *he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet.*<sup>3</sup> In these most humble actions, Jesus reminded those gathered with him in the upper room nearly two thousand years ago, and us today, that to bear the name of Christian is to live a life of sacrificial love for our neighbor.

As we know, our Lord did not stop with simply giving us an example of sacrificial love, rather, he *took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you" ... In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."*<sup>4</sup>

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord gave us His Body and Blood as food, so that through the reception of Holy Communion we would be able to receive Him into our hearts and let Him transform us into Himself, for when we eat His flesh and drink his blood, He abides in us and we abide in Him. In a very real way, we become the body of Christ alive in the world today. As the body of Christ, we are called to follow the example given by our Lord and empty ourselves in service to one another and the world.

It would have been enough if our Lord had given us an example of how to serve one another and so live as His disciples. It would have been enough if our Lord had given us His body and blood to sustain us spiritually so that we might reflect His Love to those around us. But, our Lord didn't stop there; rather, He gave His disciples the command to "do this in memory of Me," and so He gave us the gift of the ministerial

priesthood which continues to make present the Priesthood of Jesus Christ in our world today.

My dear seminarians, during the course of the Last Supper, our Lord sacramentally anticipated the altar of the Cross at which He would willingly shed the very last drop of His blood to set us free from sin and death. When a priest stands at the altar, he stands in the place of Christ, priest and victim, celebrating the same sacrifice at the same altar of the Cross. Therefore, it is my hope that over these next days as we celebrate the Paschal mystery of our Lord, that He might give you the grace to understand more fully the intimate connection of the ministerial priesthood and the sort of loving service that our Lord modeled for us. Tonight, as the Church keeps watch with our Lord, I encourage you to reflect on the great responsibility you will one day undertake in standing in the person of Christ as you serve the people of God as a priest.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may our Lord's example of loving service touch our hearts and direct our lives so that we might conform our lives more perfectly to His and live as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 13:34

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God, Daily Meditations, Volume Two: Lent and Eastertide* (London – New York: Scepter, 1987), pp. 299-300.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 13:4-5

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 11: 24-25