

Homily Outline for Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
April 18, 2019

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- I. This Holy Thursday liturgy commemorates the institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood.
 - A. The institution of the Eucharist is clear in the narrative of the Last Supper.
 - B. Interestingly, at the "Mass of the Lord's Supper," our Gospel reading does not tell us about the supper itself. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, where we are told of Jesus taking, blessing and sharing the bread and wine as His Body and Blood, we have today the Gospel of St. John, which tells us instead of the washing of the feet.

- II. The meaning of the *mandatum* – washing of the feet.
 - A. Commonly understood at a basic level as an example of hospitality, and humble service.
 - B. It is that, but there is much more than that symbolically: St. Jerome (*Epistle to Pope Damasus*) stated that the purpose of Christ's washing of His Disciples' feet was to prepare them for their duty to preach the Gospel;
 - C. St. Ambrose (*De Sacramentis* Book 3, Chapter 1) saw the foot washing as an "aid to sanctification" for the Apostles to resist the assaults of the Devil and concupiscence so as to lead lives of purity befitting their ministry.
 - D. St. Augustine (*Commentary 56 on the Gospel of John 13:6-10*) saw it as a means of purification from contact with earthly things so that hearts may be "turned upwards toward the Lord" and "enabled to dwell in His presence." This same theme of purification of the soul was used by St. Bernard, St. Cyprian and St. Gregory in their interpretation of the foot washing at the Last Supper.
 - E. Some theologians see imagery of baptism in the washing of the disciples' feet.
 - F. Other theologians see the washing of the feet as a rite of ordination.
 1. The priesthood of Aaron and the Levites in the Old Testament required them to undergo ritual foot washing before entering the temple for service at the altar (Exodus 30:19-21).
 2. Simon Peter said to Jesus, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?"
 3. Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later."
 4. Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."
 5. Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."

6. If this were a simple act of hospitality and humble service, it would not have been that hard for Peter to understand.
 7. The deeper meaning is that Jesus was replacing the old, Levitical priesthood with a new priesthood, not one handed down from father to son, but by being chosen to share in the priesthood of Christ Himself.
- III. We are blessed to with eight men who will be ordained to the diaconate next Friday as the final step toward ordination to the priesthood next year.
- A. After this homily, I will wash the feet of seven of them along with the feet of five other seminarians.
 - B. Let this be a sign of their preparation to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.
 - C. May we all pray for more vocations to the ministerial priesthood, so that through their ministry, all the faithful people of God may continue to share in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, which Our Lord gave as an enduring gift to the People of God.
- IV. May God give us this grace. Amen.

Resource: Dr. Carol Byrne, *Changing the Meaning of Our Lord's Mandatum*, online at: https://www.traditioninaction.org/HotTopics/fl29_Dialogue_48.htm.