

The celebration of the Lord's Supper recalls to our minds the **call to Christian service, the institution of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and the institution of the Eucharist**. At the same time, the liturgy should be seen as an expression of one Paschal celebration which begins this evening, extends to the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, and concludes with the solemn Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday Mass.

Being a Christian means more than just being nice. It means centering our whole lives, every last detail, on a person: **Jesus Christ**. Other great religious leaders of history pointed to their teaching. They said, "Follow my teaching". Jesus pointed to himself. He said, "**Follow me**." When Jesus stood up from the supper table, wrapped that towel around his waist, and started washing the disciples' feet, it was shocking for two reasons.

1. Because of the nature of the task. In ancient Palestine, washing other people's feet was a job reserved for slaves. By lowering himself to the level of a slave, then, Jesus is making it forever clear to his Apostles, the first leaders of the Church, that the way of Christ is a way of **self-giving**, not **self-indulgence**. Passion week liturgy narrates two washings, one today and another tomorrow. Someone asked the disciples of Jesus, "*What did your master leave behind as a legacy?*" They replied, "*A bowl and a jug of water.*"
2. He was disrupting the sacred ritual of the most sacred ceremony in Jewish tradition: the Passover meal, the ceremony that God himself had commanded Moses to institute, to commemorate the Israelites' miraculous escape from Egypt. Now Jesus replaces the uneven bread with His body and the bitter herbs with his blood, the Eucharist and he commands the apostles to do this in his memory, thus establishing **Priesthood**. Today is often referred to as Maundy Thursday taken from the word mandate. "A new command I give to you, love one another as I have loved you."

In the Eucharist Jesus Christ gives himself completely to each one of us. He comes into our lives! And when we receive him, we commit our lives to him. This is the heart of Christianity: a **person-to-person encounter**. Nowhere is this heart to heart appeal of Christ more clearly sounded than during the Last Supper. The Eucharist is the perfect summary of this dynamic, intimate relationship. It is where Christ comes to us to renew his invitation, and where we receive him, renewing our loyalty. The best way to keep Christ at the center of our lives is to keep the Eucharist at the center of our lives. The best way to love one another and to be healed of our hurts and pain, to find peace and joy is to receive the Eucharist in Holy Communion.

In the fiction *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* from "The Chronicles of Narnia" there is a scene where Father Christmas gave Lucy a little diamond bottle before the battle. It was full of **fire-flower juice**, which could cure any natural wound. The Eucharist is that supernatural medicine Christ has left the Church, the little, seemingly insignificant morsel that he applies to all of our **spiritual wounds**, to heal us from our fears and doubts, so that we can let ourselves be loved by

Christ, and become strong enough to love like Christ. As we live day by day in anxiety and fear of Coronavirus, that has taken over 11,000 lives in our country and over 80,000 lives all over the world, our spiritual support is the Eucharist. Even though we are unable to receive Jesus physically, let us receive him spiritually into our hearts.

An incident from the life of St. John Paul brings home the profound significance of what we do tonight. Bishop John Magee, who was personal secretary to the pope, tells about something that happened after Pope John Paul's election. An official came to Vatican asking to speak immediately with the new pope. Bishop Magee went to the pope's room. He was not there. He went to the library, the chapel, the kitchen, even the roof. When he couldn't find the pope, he ran to a Priest who knew the pope. "We've lost the Holy Father," he said. *"I've looked everywhere and cannot find him."*

The Polish priest asked calmly, *"Did you look in the chapel?"* "Yes," said Bishop Magee, "he was nowhere in sight." "Go further in." The Polish priest said, but do not turn on the light. Bishop Magee walked quietly into the darkened chapel. In front of the tabernacle, lying prostrate on the floor was the pope. The Polish priest knew that, before his election, the pope often prostrated himself before Jesus truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. Eucharist is the greatest gift of God's love for us.

To make this possible, he instituted **priesthood** to continue this *sacramental* multiplication through all time and space of his own merciful, and healing love. The priesthood is God's way of being present in our lives as a teacher, father, and guide, without overwhelming us. He sends his graces through priests, real men we can relate too. No more thunder and clouds of fire and smoke, as in the Old Testament.

The ordained priesthood is not a way of life, although we priests are required to live a certain way, as committed, celibate Christians. The ordained priesthood is much more than that. It is not a job. It is not a way of life. ***It is a state of being.*** We ordained priests have been changed by our ordination into **"alter Christi's"** so we can make Christ present in a sacramental way for you, His people. This transformation is permanent. Even if a priest leaves ministry, he is still interiorly a priest. Priesthood is a state of being conferred at ordination. As priests we feel humbled when we say, **"I absolve you,"** Christ forgives sins, and when we say, **"This is my Body,"** Christ changes the bread into His Body. I am humbled that somehow this takes place through me. Throughout our lives we are confronted with our shortcomings, our humanity, our own sinfulness. It is quite humbling to be a priest.

As we celebrate Passover meal in our own homes, let us also remember all our parishioners, the poor, the suffering, the elderly living alone, and those most in need. ***Thank you! for your food donation on Palm Sunday for the poor. It was amazing to see cars after cars, drive into our parking lot with supplies. God Bless you all.***