

**HOMILY BY HIS EXCELLENCY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY THURSDAY, MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 6, 2023**

My dear brothers and sisters,

“The love that we celebrate in the [Eucharist] is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him.”¹

The truth of these words, which were written by Pope Benedict, is expressed also by Pope Francis, who says:

“Sometimes, there is the risk of confining the Eucharist to a vague, distant dimension, perhaps bright and perfumed with incense, but distant from the straits of everyday life.... Our Eucharistic adoration comes alive when we take care of our neighbor like Jesus does.... We need to *eat and feed others*.”²

This theme, which has been emphasized by our last two Popes – the theme of the Eucharist being the *Sacrament of Charity* – comes from what Jesus reveals about himself in tonight’s Gospel from John, and in this Holy Thursday liturgy. In the context of our Lord’s last supper with his disciples, in which he gives them the Eucharist, *he also washes their feet*, thus making himself their humble servant in love. By connecting the institution of the Eucharist with the washing of the feet, the Church wants to ensure that Christians never separate the Eucharistic liturgy from the commandment to love. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet,” says Jesus, “you ought to wash one another’s feet.”³

And this is the point: We honor the Eucharist by believing in the Real Presence, adoring the Blessed Sacrament, and receiving Holy Communion at Mass; but our “eucharistic life” cannot end there. Because the Eucharist is the *Gift of the love of Jesus for us*, we must make ourselves a *gift of love to others*. Let us consider how we can do this.

Everyone who comes to this Basilica experiences a marvelous expression of the Church’s liturgy. If you’ve been here before, you know this. If this is your first time in this Basilica, welcome! To the priests, religious, and lay faithful who prepare and carry out these liturgies, we are grateful! The beautiful singing, the golden vessels, the processions, the incense, the decorations, and the impressive building itself: all of these things make us *feel* the splendor and the beauty of God. Beyond our worship here in this Basilica, countless other Christians are also participating in these sacred liturgies in their churches and parishes. Separated by distance, but united in a common faith, we are having an *encounter* with God. This

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* 84, 22 February 2007.

² Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 19 June 2022.

³ *John* 13:13-14.

encounter will deepen our sense of God's love, renew us in his mercy, and give new energy to our risen life with Christ. And for all of this, we thank God!

But when we are truly thankful, one of the fruits of gratitude is fraternal love. Therefore, as we find ourselves blessed by God's encounter with us this Holy Week, we should think of those many people who are not joining us in these liturgies. There are many reasons that some of our brothers and sisters do not join us at church – not only during Holy Week, but even from Sunday to Sunday throughout the year. Some people are burdened by excessive work, and even then they still barely manage to provide for their families. Others are dealing with difficult situations in the home, which make attending Mass sometimes a heroic act, and at other times impossible. Still others are in prison – such as the young people with whom the Holy Father celebrated Mass today in Rome. In parts of the world, war and persecution prevent faithful Christians from attending the divine liturgy. Let us remember, also, the people who have been deeply wounded by members of the Church, and who, for that reason, find it difficult to gather within the Church's assembly.

If we are honest, we must refrain from judging people who do not join us in worship, or who do not believe what we proclaim. They, too, are the children of God; he loves them and longs for them with a Father's heart. For them, too, Christ gave his body and blood. He wants to encounter them, in their situations of suffering, just as much as he encounters us in this liturgy. For those who do not fully believe in the real presence of Christ in this sacrament, devotions and teaching alone will not be enough. We must give them a visible, concrete expression of our love. *We* must be eucharist to them. We must be Christ to them.

"In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God's image and likeness, and becomes our companion along the way."⁴ In our turn, the Eucharist compels *us* to meet *others*, and to become *their* companion. This is what it means to be Christian. This is what it means to imitate the One whom we encounter in the Eucharist.

Tonight, in this beautiful liturgy, Jesus lowers himself and pours out his love for us. He "washes our feet". And he says to us, the same thing he said to his disciples on that first Holy Thursday: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."⁵

My brothers and sisters, to use once again the words of Pope Benedict: "The love that we celebrate in the [Eucharist] is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him."⁶

Let us be agents of this encounter for others.

⁴ *Sacramentum Caritatis* 2; cf. *Genesis* 1:27.

⁵ *John* 13:15.

⁶ *Sacramentum Caritatis* 84.