

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**  
**BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**  
**WASHINGTON, DC, APRIL 1, 2021**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his paternal affection and spiritual closeness to all of you, assuring you of his prayers, as we beginning this Sacred Triduum, the climax of the Church's liturgical year. In a special way, I greet all those joining this liturgy by television and the internet, especially the sick, the suffering, and the homebound.

*Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. Although Judas and others plotted to kill Him, Jesus, knowing their intentions, still loved them to the end!*

On this evening, we remember the gifts of His love: the priesthood and the Holy Eucharist, which He instituted at the Last Supper. Of the Eucharistic sacrifice, Saint John Paul II wrote:

This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. ... What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes "to the end" (cf. *Jn 13:1*), a love which knows no measure. (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003, 11)

The Lord desires to give Himself to His people that they might share in His life. What motivated Christ to do this? Love. The Eucharist is rightly called the Sacrament of Charity. No one has ever desired anything more than God desires to share His life with us. It was God's love for us that inspired His plan to save us through the Birth, Death and Resurrection of His Son. It was God's love that motivated the sending of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. We were created so that God could share His life with us.

We share in His life in and through the priesthood of Christ. Christ instituted the priesthood on the same night that He instituted the Eucharist, commanding His disciples to "*Do this in memory of me.*" He not only gave His Apostles a command, but He also left them a precious example of priestly service.

*He loved his own in the world and He loved them to the end.* He washed the feet of His disciples, knowing their weakness and knowing that Judas would betray Him. Jesus washed their feet, first offering them an example of how they were to act and then teaching them more specifically what they were to do. He gave them an example of both humility and charity in washing their feet and encouraged them by his teaching: *If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you also should do.* (*Jn 13:14-15*)

Why does Jesus wash His disciples' feet? One obvious answer is that He wants to teach them that they are to serve their brothers and sisters. But there is more to this act than a simple teaching. He wants

to give them the example of humility. He, who was their Lord and God, stripped Himself of glory and washed their feet, becoming a slave for them.

This is the meaning of the whole life and Passion of Jesus: He bends down to our dirty feet, the dirt of humanity, and washes us clean in His greater love. Historically, the slave would wash his master's feet so that the master would be suitably prepared to sit at table for a meal with his guests. Jesus Christ prepares us, for God's presence and for one another's company, so that we can together partake of His Body and Blood. He does this for us, who can scarcely stand one another at times; for us, who are unfit to be with God; for us who are weak in faith. Through His service we are prepared to be with God, to have access to God – if we are willing to yield to God's love.

He, who was their Master and Teacher, washed their feet. In the Savior, we see what the ministers of Christ should do. Here we understand that one uses authority for service. In Judas, we learn that there are those who profess Christ with their lips, who partake of His Precious Food, who allow Him to wash their feet, but who interiorly conspire against Him, loving the world more than Christ. In the other Apostles, we see those, who although fragile and weak, present their affections to Christ – to be washed and purified – desiring truly to have a portion in His life; they would stumble and fall, but they truly loved Him.

Christ offers an example not only to the clergy, but to all of us. For He got up from the table, took off His outer garments, before tying a towel around His waist to wash His disciples' feet. We too must arise and take off our outer garments – that is, the old man, those lifestyles marked by sinfulness – and put on the new, transformed by the grace of conversion. We arise from mere knowledge of Christ's teaching to action; from meal to labor; from letter to spirit. Those impediments to virtue must be put aside in favor of the white garment, symbolic of a life of integrity, so that we may be witnesses to Christ's love as His disciples.

Each of us here is a disciple – a disciple who is loved by Christ. We are loved so much by Him that He willingly allowed Himself to be handed over for us. This evening we are invited to respond to His love – to commit ourselves to deepening our friendship with the Lord Jesus and with all those whom He loves. Indeed, we as Catholics, called to share in the Divine Life, are called also to model this sacrificial love. With gratitude for the love the Lord has shown us, we offer ourselves in love for others. The gift of the Holy Eucharist, which we receive, came at a price: He gave up His Body and Blood *for us*.

The Eucharist is a living reminder that Christ lived and lives for others, and as His disciples, we should do the same. I conclude with the words of Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa:

“With the washing of feet, it's as if Jesus were summarizing the meaning of His life to impress it on the disciples' minds so that when the time came for them to understand, they would do so ... Placed at the conclusion of the Gospels, this action tells us that the whole of the life of Jesus, from beginning to end, was a washing of feet, and that is to say, a service to humanity. It was a *pro-existence*, or a life lived for others.” (Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Eucharist: Our Sanctification* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press) 1995, 66)

Inspired by the Wondrous Love of the Redeemer, may we be granted the grace to live for others.