

**Homily for Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“The most sacred supper.”

“A sacrifice new for all eternity.”

“The Banquet of Christ's love.”

“The fullness of charity and of life.”

These are phrases from the Opening Prayer that I offered at the beginning of this Evening's Mass of the Lord's Supper. The Opening Prayer at Mass is also called the Collect, because the presider in a very real sense collects the prayers of the faithful in this prayer addressed to the Father, through Jesus, the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Since the Collect expresses the theme of the celebration, let us listen to it again in its entirety:

O God, who have called us to participate  
in this most sacred Supper,  
in which your Only Begotten Son,  
when about to hand himself over to death,

entrusted to the Church a sacrifice new for all eternity,  
the banquet of his love, grant, we pray,  
that we may draw from so great a mystery,  
the fullness of charity and of life.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.

This is a “most sacred Supper” because it was at this Last Supper that Our Lord instituted the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. These two sacraments are intrinsically related to each other. There is no Eucharist without the priest and priesthood would be meaningless without the Eucharist.

This is “a sacrifice new for all eternity” because it is unlike all the other sacrifices that were offered in the Old Testament and the one Sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we celebrate at every Mass will last forever.

“This is the Banquet of Christ’s love” and “the fullness of charity and of life” because the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist fills our hearts with His love and gives us the grace we need to be charitable to others. Of course, the most charitable thing we can do is to help lead them to eternal life.

As noted earlier, on Holy Thursday the Church celebrates the institution of the Eucharist and the sacrament of the priesthood. The setting is the final supper that Jesus shares with His disciples. What He does during that supper is both surprising and unique to the Gospel of John. Instead of reporting the words that Jesus said over the bread and wine, changing them into the Body and Blood of Christ, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples.

Typical of Saint John's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as being fully aware of everything that is going on around Him. He knows what He is going to do and why He is doing it. During supper He clothes Himself with the towel of a servant and pours water into a basin. Then He begins to wash the feet of his disciples, one by one. Symbolically, He is performing a radical gesture of service for His disciples.

It demonstrates the ultimate service He will give them when He is lifted up on the cross and dies in an act that cleanses us from sin by His sacrificial death.

Peter, no doubt, expresses the awkwardness and confusion of all the disciples as Jesus continues His action of washing feet. If anything, the disciples should be lining up and washing Jesus' feet. Peter wants no part

in this action. What Peter fails to understand is that this symbolic action points to salvation. By dying on the cross, Jesus will ultimately open the way to salvation for all those who believe in Him. Still confused, Peter then moves to the opposite position of wanting an entire bath. Because this is a symbolic act, a full bath is not needed.

When Jesus finishes washing the disciples' feet, He asks if they know what He has just done for them. When they do not answer, Jesus gives them further instructions, providing a model of how they are to live after He is gone. They are to love one another as He has loved them, which He has just symbolized by washing their feet. That means that they also are to wash one another's feet. This action symbolizes the loving service that we are to provide to others.

My brothers and sisters in Christ: Our Diocesan Eucharistic Congress with 5,000 participants at the BOS Convention Center in Springfield in October of 2023 and the National Eucharistic Congress last summer in Indianapolis with 60,000 Catholics gathered in person and countless more joined with us via livestream were major parts of the National Eucharistic Revival, which now continues with a special Year of Mission. This Year of Mission calls for Catholics to share their rekindled love of the Eucharist

with other people. This is an essential aspect of our being disciples of Jesus Christ and stewards of God's gifts of creation. This is a time for all of us to reflect on the significance of the Holy Eucharist and its impact on the way we live.

Some people complain that "Mass is boring." "I don't get anything out of it." "I stopped going to Mass because I was not being spiritually fed."

These are some of the reasons that people give for not going to Mass. On Easter Sunday many of our churches will be packed with people, so we might wonder also why some Catholics go to Mass only twice a year, on Christmas and Easter, but not the rest of the year.

"Mass is boring." This excuse stems from an expectation that Mass is a form of entertainment. We go to a movie, a play, or a concert expecting to be entertained. Our attendance at such events is passive, expecting the performers to provide an engaging and enjoyable experience. For people with such expectations, a homily that is not best-seller quality is disappointing and music that does not meet Grammy Award winning standards is not worth listening to. The problem with this approach is that Mass is not meant to be entertainment.

The primary reason we go to Mass is to worship God. At a minimum, worshipping God is a matter of obligation and justice. The obligation to attend Mass every Sunday comes from the Third Commandment of the Decalogue, that is, the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses to hand on to the people as described in the Old Testament of the Bible in the Book of Exodus (20:8-11) and the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12-15). Some translations of the Bible translate the Third Commandment as, "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day." Other translations say, "Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day." This obligation, then, comes from God. As such, it is Divine Law, not a man-made law.

For the people of Israel in the Old Testament as well as for Jewish people today, the sabbath or the Lord's Day is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Christians observe Sunday as the Lord's Day because Sunday is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Since Sunday celebrates our Lord's resurrection, every Sunday in a sense is an Easter celebration. Christians who go to church on Easter Sunday because they want to celebrate our Lord's resurrection really should want to go to Mass every Sunday to celebrate our Lord's resurrection from the dead. In fact, many people who

truly understand and appreciate the meaning of the Mass go to church daily to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, not just on Sundays.

Saint Ambrose said, "If [Holy Communion] is 'daily bread,' why do you take it once a year? Take daily what is to profit you daily. Live in such a way that you may deserve to receive it daily. He who does not deserve to receive it daily, does not deserve to receive it once a year."

Going to Mass is a matter of justice because justice is defined as giving to others what is due or owed to them, and we owe it to God to worship Him as our Creator and thank Him for our lives and for all the gifts of His creation. In fact, the Mass is also referred to as the Eucharist, a Greek word that means "thanksgiving." Our national holiday of Thanksgiving, which is observed every year on the fourth Thursday of November, is one of the most popular holidays in our country for secular as well as for religious people. In a sense, every Eucharist is a thanksgiving celebration.

"I don't get anything out of it." This excuse stems from an entitlement mentality. Such people think, "God owes me something" or "The Church owes me something." This approach views God as someone who is expected to fulfill their wants and desires. If I pray to God and He

does not give me what I want, then I get angry with God and think there is no point in praying to Him because he does not seem to answer my prayers. But God actually gives us everything that is essential that we need, namely the forgiveness of our sins through Our Lord's suffering and death on the cross and the invitation to share eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven, the gates of which were opened to us through Christ's resurrection from the dead.

"I stopped going to Mass because I was not being spiritually fed." This excuse is puzzling because Our Lord feeds us with His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity every time we receive Holy Communion. Anyone who says that he or she is not being spiritually fed at Mass does not understand or appreciate or perhaps does not even believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Lumen Gentium, 11). St. Padre Pio said, "Always remain close to the Catholic Church, because it alone can give you true peace, since it alone possesses Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the true Prince of Peace."

May God give us this grace. Amen.