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Mass of the Lord's Supper

Date: Thursday, April 18, 2019 | **Season:** Sacred Paschal Triduum | **Year:** C
First Reading: Exodus 12:1–8, 11–14
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116:12–13, 15–16c, 17–18 | **Response:** 1 Corinthians 10:16
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26
Gospel Acclamation: John 13:34
Gospel Reading: John 13:1–15
Preached at: the St Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Orlando West, Soweto **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

My brothers and sisters, tonight we gather to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper and we are asked to remember and recall the great gifts that God has given us. We celebrate tonight together, a Mass that marks the beginning of our Sacred Paschal Triduum – the holiest days of the year – and a Mass that, in a particular way, celebrates and asks us to remember, three things in particular: the priesthood, the Eucharist and a love that is stronger than death. These are the three things I'd like us to think about this evening.

So we remember, in a special way this evening, as we commemorate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, that it begins firstly with service.

In our Gospel we are given the example of Jesus who washes the feet of his disciples. This is John's version of the Last Supper. Instead of commemorating the Eucharist, John tells us what the Eucharist is meant to be for us – what it will enable us to do – how we can truly imitate God, so that, as we often pray after communion, we might become what we consume, we might become more like God. When we receive Christ's body and blood in communion, we take on a part of Christ, and so must also behave as he behaved. Jesus is the perfect example of the priesthood. This is a priesthood that is shared by all the baptized and is one which is identified with humble service. This is the core of the priesthood. When we imitate Christ, we imitate Jesus who served. He did not exclude people or become stingy in his generous service. He served all, but most especially, he served those who were outcast and alone.

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Let us consider in our lives, how each of us, who are priest, prophet and king – or queen – for God, baptized to evangelize and share our faith with each other, how do we live our priesthood? How do we serve each other?

A priesthood – specifically the ordained priesthood which was celebrated this morning at the Cathedral – must always be one of service. It builds on the common priesthood but it does not replace it. The priesthood of all believers is a sign in our Church to remind all of us who are ordained, to stay true to that calling.

How important it is in our society in South Africa today, for all of us Christians to recall that true calling. We have seen what happens in our society when we forget to serve each other. When we allow greed and other vices to cloud our lives, and we cease to listen to our conscience – how quickly things fall apart. But Jesus came to heal us and bind our wounds. His example was one which was meant to stop us from becoming what we have seen in recent years. Let us remember tonight and recommit ourselves this evening, to living a life of service – not just in our private lives, but in our public ones too.

We are also called tonight, to remember, secondly, the Eucharist. We celebrate the Eucharist, after all, week after week. And sometimes we might forget the significance of what we are doing. But as we do it tonight – we do it with a special intention to remember its true purpose.

In our first reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear how the Passover is described as “a memorial feast” for all generations. During the first reading we heard the story of the institution of the Passover for the Jews. How they were meant to celebrate it so that they remembered. We read it tonight not just to link the event of the Jewish ritual week after week, with our celebration of the Eucharist. No – we see in the Eucharist the liberating force that was the occasion for what the Jews commemorate. The sacrifice, preparation, and eating of the lamb was to symbolize the entire act of liberation from Egypt, and the blood smeared on the doorposts was a symbolic act of protection from the powers of evil and death. Our Eucharist, when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, is meant to heal, liberate and protect us. It is intended as a feast for us all, and as Pope Francis rightly describes it, as “medicine for the weak, not a prize for the perfect.”

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In our second reading, we hear how this is something we do in remembrance of Him. At each Eucharistic celebration, the bread is broken and shared, and the cup is poured and drained in remembrance of Jesus. But not just for us to remember, but also for us to proclaim, so that others might experience the sacrifice of Jesus, giving us Himself in His Body and Blood, so that we might appreciate His life that was given, so that we too might have life. We do this so that we can, in our own ways, give our lives so that those we love might receive the love that we received. St Paul calls us to receive the Eucharist as faithfully as we can, and so we honour the tradition handed onto us each time we come to receive Our Lord in communion, if we truly remember the real presence of God in our midst. Then we will be minded to behave as he did when he was with us.

Let us ask ourselves this evening what we think about the Eucharist. How do we receive it? Are we grateful for it? Can we allow it to transform our hearts and minds?

In our Gospel, Jesus interprets his death by washing his disciples' feet. When Peter protests, Jesus tells him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later" Peter we know, will remember; but so must we. And that is why, after remembering this, that tonight we wash one another's feet. To remind each other and ourselves, of what we are all called to do. To lovingly serve each other.

Washing another's feet – is a humble act. It is personal and intimate. It is also rare. Jesus did this, breaking customs at the time, to show us how much he loved us. It was not only in giving himself up to death, but also in leaving us the Eucharist, and the example of how to serve each other – that we can truly understand how Christ loved the world.

St Ignatius – you have all heard before – said that "Love shows itself more in deeds, than in words." When we celebrate tonight and recall the institution of the Eucharist, we are given not just words, but also concrete actions to follow. We share bread and wine that become Christ's body and blood. But we also wash each other's feet to remind us of the service we are all called to. We remember the priesthood that each of us, by virtue of our baptism, participates in – and we ask ourselves – how do we serve? How do we give ourselves? How do we become free so that we can give ourselves? How do we love?

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Because finally, the thing we must all remember this evening – is that God loved us first. We all try to love God, but our loving Him is a response to him having loved us first.

I'd like to invite us now to think how do we love? Who have we loved, and have we loved them like Jesus would want us to? Obviously there are different ways of loving – but true love is one that brings us out of ourselves, that makes us want to help the other person, to serve the other person, to put that person's needs above our own. Say thank you this evening for who God has brought into your lives, for who he has allowed you to love. Allow the God who is love, to fill your hearts and minds with the love that only he can give.

There's a beautiful meditation in Ignatian Spirituality, and I'd like to invite you to try it tonight.

Imagine the Trinity looking down on creation and seeing the world.

The world as good but hurting.

The world as beautiful, but broken.

The world as you and me, and each of our friends and families.

The world in time.

But the Trinity sees the whole world.

They see all time.

And they decide that they want to come to Earth,

to become human,

to save the world from itself.

Just like in our country where we allowed greed and corruption to flourish,

God saw how sin was hurting us

and God only desired for us to be in relationship with God.

And so The Son comes to earth,

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even though he knows how he must leave it – he comes.

God becomes Man

and we celebrate that incarnation at Christmas.

But tonight – we celebrate not only the purpose of God's coming,

but also we say,

as we said in the Psalm,

thank you for his coming

and thank you for giving himself to us.

He came for each one of us

and he leaves us ways to remember him.

In Mass each week,

at Communion,

and in each other,

in the Scriptures

and in the examples of service that he showed us,

we can find God.

We can find God in each other

because we are images of God.

We can remember Him.

We can remind ourselves of why he came.

Because he loved us.

He loved me, and he loved you.

Acknowledge that love tonight.

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Think about it.

Treasure it.

Keep it.

Believe it.

Because God loved you so much

that he came to take away your sin,

and to leave you with the sacraments that offer grace and forgiveness,

mercy and redemption,

friendship with God

and a sure way to salvation with Him.

God came to save you,

and this weekend we celebrate that saving action.

I invite you to offer to God this evening,

everything that holds you back from loving Him.

Allow him to free you,

allow him to help you.

Allow him to love you so that you truly experience and feel that love.

When you receive communion,

do so freely and in grateful remembrance

of all the good things God has done in your life.

As you celebrate God's gifts to you,

imitate him in your dealings with others

so that the love he has for you

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can become the love you have for other people

and allow this love to be shown in service.

Because if we truly serve each other out of love,

we are on the way to sainthood –

which is the calling of Jesus to each one of us tonight.

To be saints among the saints, to be, in other words, with God.

Amen. Now let us, with that love of God fresh in our minds, recall the ritual of service that we read about this evening. Let us wash each other's feet. We cannot all do that now, but I invite you to pray for those whose feet you need to wash this evening. Pray for them, for a conversion in their lives and yours, so that they might experience the love of God as you have this evening, and that you may both answer that call to love each other.

Amen.

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