



*Homily – Holy Thursday, Mass of the Lord’s Supper 2011 (A)<sup>i</sup>*

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*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels  
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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Tonight in this celebration we enter into the Easter Triduum.

In these next three days, Jesus will win salvation for us. In suffering and dying, he will destroy sin and death. In rising, he will restore our ability to walk in the newness of life.

On this night, long ago, our Lord gave us three gifts by which he would remain with us always, until the end of time. Three signs that will continue to make God’s love real in our lives and in our world, until he comes again in glory with his angels.

On this night, Jesus gave us the gift of the priesthood of the new covenant, the gift of the Eucharist, and the gift of his example of love.

At his Last Supper, Jesus ordained his apostles to share in his priesthood and act in his person, *in persona Christi*. The priest continues this apostolic mission.

As I said in the Chrism Mass earlier this Holy Week, only the priest can speak in the name and person of Jesus Christ. Only he can speak and make real the promises of our salvation.

St. Augustine has a beautiful expression. He called the priesthood the “office of love,” the *amoris officium*.<sup>ii</sup>

So tonight as we gather in this beautiful Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, we give thanks for the great gift of this “office of love.” We thank God for the witness of our priests, for their sacred ministry.

My brothers and sisters, we should give thanks for our priests every day! We should give thanks for the men who are training in our seminary. And we should pray every day that God sends us more men for this holy office, more vocations to the priesthood.

All of our Lord’s gifts are contained in the Holy Eucharist.

The priesthood flows from the Eucharist and serves the Eucharist. And Jesus shows us the “inner logic” of the Eucharist — why the Eucharist is so important in the Gospel this evening. He does this with his example of washing his disciples’ feet.

In the Eucharist, we proclaim the Lord’s *death*, St. Paul tells us today in the second reading.

Jesus turned his death on the cross into a prayer — a sacrifice of thanksgiving offered for us. He became our Passover lamb, as we heard in the first reading. His blood became the sign of our salvation.

The Eucharist shows us the cross and tells us how much God loves each one of us. But we can never separate his cross from his resurrection. The Eucharist is also a promise for the future.

Paul tells us tonight: we proclaim the Lord’s death *until he comes*.

The One who *comes* to us in this celebration is the One who has risen. He is the One who died and behold is alive for evermore.<sup>iii</sup>

And because he has risen, we know that we will also rise. Jesus not only *died* for us. He *rose* for us also!

The Eucharist is the sacrament of this great hope that we have of eternal life.

Jesus gave us his word on this: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has *eternal life*, and I will *raise him up* on the last day.”<sup>iv</sup>

We can really understand that the Eucharist is the center of the Christian life.

That’s why St. Ignatius of Antioch, a Father of the Church who was a disciple of St. John the Apostle, called the Eucharist: “a medicine of immortality, an antidote of death.”<sup>v</sup>

My brothers and sisters, we need to live with the Eucharistic faith of the early Christians!

St. Ignatius was a bishop who was condemned to die by the Roman Emperor in the early second century. He wrote beautiful letters, especially while he was being transported in a cage to Rome for his execution.

In these letters he described his death as a sacrifice to God. He knew that he was about to die. And he knew he was going to be fed to the lions. It was a horrible, horrible martyrdom. And he wrote this: “I am the wheat of God! So let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the *pure bread of Christ*.”<sup>vi</sup>

A person doesn't think about his death that way unless he has already been living his life that way. Ignatius was formed by the Eucharist. He thought of his body and blood — he thought of his life — as the Eucharist. The center of his life was the Eucharist.

We can say that he lived his life *Eucharistically*. And this is how we must live our lives too. Our Christian life, our whole life, must be centered in the Eucharist.

This is what our Lord is teaching us today in the Gospel when he washes his disciples' feet.

In that time, foot washing was a job for servants. That's why the apostles were so upset. They didn't get it. They were seeing only the external sign.

Jesus tells them: "Afterward you will understand." Yes, they were able to understand after his crucifixion, after his resurrection.

In this one beautiful symbol, Jesus shows us the meaning of his whole life — and the inner logic of the Eucharist.

He takes off his outer garment in a sign of humility. And he bends down to serve.

The Eucharist is going to take us to humility and service. Jesus, perfect God and perfect man, is giving us an example of absolute and complete service. It shows us, my brothers and sisters, how much we are worth to God. Jesus Christ kneels before you to wash your feet. He offers his body for you on the cross. He offers his Body and Blood to be food for you in the Eucharist.

So tonight, we have to ask for the grace to correspond to God's love for us. We will do that if we follow Jesus' example — the witness of love that he showed us washing the feet of the apostles, the witness of love that he showed us giving his life for each one of us in on the cross.

That's the call that we have. That's our Christian call: to imitate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we do that, my brothers and sisters, if we have the Eucharist as the center of our lives.

We are called to present our lives as living sacrifices to God. To offer everything we do as a spiritual sacrifice of praise.<sup>vii</sup>

Everything can be centered in the Eucharist. Every little thing that you do every day must be centered in the Eucharist.

Again tonight, let us ask for the grace to have the Eucharist as the center and source of our Christian lives.

Let us ask Mary, Our Blessed Mother, for her intercession. That we all can live our lives Eucharistically. That we can be Eucharistic souls, and be able to turn everything we do into a prayer, in perfect union with our Lord Jesus Christ, starting with a real commitment to service of God and one another.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings: Exod. 12:1–8, 11–14; Ps. 116:12–13, 15–18; 1 Cor. 11:23–26; John 13:1–15.

<sup>ii</sup> *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John*, 123:5; compare Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 23.

<sup>iii</sup> Rev. 1:18.

<sup>iv</sup> John 6:54.

<sup>v</sup> *To the Ephesians*, 20.

<sup>vi</sup> Aquilina, *The Fathers of the Church*, rev. ed. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2006), 65.

<sup>vii</sup> Matt. 16:24–25; 1 John 3:16–18; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5.