

HOLY THURSDAY

“For if I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (Jn. 13: 15).

The Triduum: The celebration tonight marks the beginning of Easter Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. The ceremonies of these last days of our Lenten fast and preparations (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday) are wrapped up in an uninterrupted and unbroken tapestry of love and sacrifice. On this night, as we listened to the Readings, especially the Gospel (Jn. 13: 1-15), we commemorate the Lord’s Supper, where Our Lord Jesus, while at table, washed the feet of His disciples; took bread and wine, blessed, broke, and gave to His disciples as His Body and Blood. Thus, tonight we celebrate the priesthood and the gift of the Eucharist.

The Washing of the Feet: In the Old Testament priesthood, washing (of the feet) was part of the rite of ordination: “This is the ceremony you must follow when you consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests ... Present Aaron and his sons at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and wash them with water (Ex. 29: 1, 4); “So Moses followed the Lord’s instructions, and the whole community assembled the Tabernacle entrance ... Then, he presented Aaron and his sons and washed them with water (Lev. 8: 4, 6). By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus, the New Moses, was invariably ordaining them as priests. He shared His priesthood with them. The priesthood is a gift of grace offered to man by God so that humanity may have a relationship with the divine. The Letter to the Hebrews captures this understanding most succinctly: “Every high priest is chosen from among men to act in their relations with God” (Heb. 5: 1). Embedded in this act is humility, service, and love. “For if I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (Jn. 13: 15). Christ, though He was God, emptied Himself and took up the service of a slave by washing the feet of His disciples. This points to the intrinsic relationship between priesthood, humility, love, and service. That is the reason he told them “I have given you an example so that you may copy Me and wash each other’s feet. But this is the model of Christianity: for as Christians, configured into the image and person of Christ, we are expected to wash each other’s feet. The times we forgive when we have no reasons to do so, we are washing the feet of the other; when we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, cloth to the

naked, we are washing their feet; when we stand up for truth and justice, especially to save the weak and the voiceless, we are washing their feet as well.

The Eucharist and The Priesthood: There were many priests in the Old Testament who offered many animal sacrifices – the Jewish religion was a haemorrhage of blood – until Christ came as the one only priest of the New Testament who offered one and only one sacrifice, not with animal blood but with His Body and Blood. He intended this gift to be a sacrifice in perpetuity therefore he gave us priests, who will “Do this in memory of Me” (Lk. 22: 19). The priest and the Eucharist are inseparably connected for the priesthood receives its essence and relevance from the Eucharist and the Eucharist is made present only by the sacrifice offered by the priest. It is divine wisdom that the priests be ordained so that the Eucharist may be made available and accessible to all who believe, so that we can receive Christ and be like Him. St. Augustine, writing about the Eucharist, said that if we receive the Holy Communion worthily, we become what we receive – like Christ (Sermon 227). And therefore, like Christ, we are to sacrifice ourselves and, in that sense, become what we eat. Just as Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, when we receive the Eucharist, we are to allow ourselves to be taken by Jesus, blessed, broken, and given in love for others.

My dear friends, tonight after the Last Supper, Jesus, knowing what was awaiting Him, left for the Garden of Gethsemane, where the ultimate battle begins. In the garden the Old Adam failed the test of resilience and faith, in the garden the New Adam offered the final “Yes” to the will of the Father. Out of love for us all Christ accepted, embraced Judas, offered His cheek to be kissed and His hands to be led off. Let us follow Jesus on the walk of our salvation to the Cross and into the tomb so that we can rise with Him on the Resurrection morning.