

HOLY THURSDAY

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Mass of the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate this evening, is unique on the Church's liturgical calendar.

1. Priesthood and the Eucharist.

This evening we celebrate the dual institution of the Priesthood and the Most Holy Eucharist. These two sacraments are inseparable. Without priests we cannot have the Eucharist, and without the Eucharist, we would not be sustained in nurturing priests. The Eucharist is the very epicenter of the Christian life, and yet, so few people come to adore our Lord present in the Eucharistic species! On the Feast of Corpus Christi I will focus on the Eucharist. Tonight I will say a few things on the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. St John Mary Vianney on the Priesthoodⁱ

What is a priest? A man who holds the place of God - a man who is invested with all the powers of God. When the priest remits sins, he does not say, "God pardons you"; he says, "I absolve you." At the Consecration, he does not say, "This is the Body of Our Lord;" he says, "This is My Body."

Saint Bernard tells us that everything has come to us through Mary; and we may also say that everything has come to us through the priest; yes, all happiness, all graces, all heavenly gifts. If we had not the Sacrament of [Holy] Orders, we should not have Our Lord. Who placed Him there, in that tabernacle? It was the priest. Who was it that received your soul, on its entrance into life? The priest! Who nourishes it, to give it strength to make its pilgrimage? The priest! Who will prepare it to appear before God, by washing that soul, for the last time, in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest - always the priest! And if that soul comes to the point of death, who will raise it up, who will restore it to calmness and peace? Again, the priest!

Go to confession to the Blessed Virgin, or to an angel; will they absolve you? No. Will they give you the Body and Blood of Our Lord? No. The Holy Virgin cannot make her Divine Son descend into the Host. You might have two hundred angels there, but they could not absolve you. A priest, however simple he may be, can do it; he can say to you, "Go in peace; I pardon you." Oh, how great is a priest! The priest will not understand the greatness of his office till he is in Heaven. If he understood it on earth, he would die, not of fear, but of love.

The priest is not a priest for himself; he does not give himself absolution; he does not administer the Sacraments to himself. He is not for himself, he is for you. After God, the priest is everything. Leave a parish twenty years without priests; they will worship beasts. ... “When people wish to destroy religion, they begin by attacking the priest, because where there is no longer any priest there is no sacrifice, and where there is no longer any sacrifice there is no religion.

The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus. When you see the priest, think of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The Washing of Feet.

The Gospel offers us a glimpse of the nature of Christ’s Priesthood — He came to serve and not to be served. This is shown in the fact that he took off his outer garment and washed the feet of the twelve, taking the place of a servant.

The practice of washing the feet of strangers or guests is of very great antiquity. ... In the East, the place of its birth, poor people would go barefoot, and others would wear sandals that did no more than protect the soles of the feet. In the dry and dusty conditions, one’s feet were often in need of a good cleaning.

‘In biblical times it was prescribed that the host of a banquet was to provide water (and a basin) so that his guests could wash their hands before sitting down to table. Although a host might also provide water for travelers to wash their own feet before entering the house, the host himself would not wash the feet of his guests. According to the Talmud the washing of feet was forbidden to any Jew except those in slavery.’ⁱⁱ

While the lowest of the slaves in a given household was expected to wash the feet of any guests, it would be totally unexpected that the host would do this gesture of welcome. And, yet, this is exactly what our Lord did.

“By washing His disciples’ feet, the Master shows us how far we should humble ourselves to render service to our neighbor. [He] teaches us that our charity is far from His unless we repay evil with good [and] forgive everything... that our love is incomplete if we cannot sacrifice ourselves generously for others.”ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.fisheaters.com/holyorders2.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/triduum/holy-thursday-mandatum.cfm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Fr Gabriel of St Mary Magdalen, 1996, *DIVINE INTIMACY*, TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., Rockford, IL, p. 406