

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
EVENING MASS OF THE LORD’S SUPPER (HOLY THURSDAY)  
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
MARCH 28, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings to you as we enter this Sacred Triduum, the three days in which the mysteries of our Lord’s Passover from death to life are solemnly celebrated. As the Pope’s representative to this country, I assure you that the Holy Father is spiritually close to you and walks with you during these holy days.

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At the liturgy of Palm Sunday, we met Jesus as he began his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He was hailed as “King”, because indeed he *is* a king. But his is a *humble* kingship. He rode into Jerusalem seated on a beast of burden. As the Gospel of his Passion was read, we saw that *he* was the one carrying the burden of the Cross. And so, we were reminded that Jesus only achieves the Father’s glory by suffering death at the hands of sinners. This is a different kind of kingship indeed!

Tonight, we see that the humility of Jesus’ kingship was no illusion. At the beginning of the Lord’s “hour”,<sup>1</sup> while seated with the Apostles at the Passover meal, he lowers himself into the position of a slave to wash the feet of the disciples. Simon Peter is scandalized – just as so many, even today, are scandalized by a power that is exercised through service instead of domination. By performing this action during the meal in which he instituted the Eucharist, Jesus teaches an essential lesson to us, his Church: **Our participation in the Eucharist must always be linked to humble charity toward our brothers and sisters.**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *John* 13:1.

Early in the Church’s history, the separation of sacrament from fraternal love was already an issue for the Christians at Corinth. There, factions among the people were on display when they came together to eat the Lord’s Supper. In the second reading of this Mass, St. Paul teaches the Corinthians – *and he teaches us* – that our eating of the bread and drinking of the cup is a remembrance of the Lord, who gave himself for us out of love. Therefore, to divide ourselves from one another is to act in contradiction to the meaning of the Eucharist we celebrate.

What does the humble charity of Jesus the King look like at the Last Supper? It is the *love from the heart* that Jesus showed to all people. Even before his arrest, trial, and condemnation, the Lord is already in a sense “handing himself over to sinners”,<sup>2</sup> since each of the Twelve Apostles was a sinner. They were obstinate in their failure to understand the mystery that was unfolding – especially the mystery of his impending death. Some would betray him bitterly, including Judas and Simon Peter. Most of them would flee. Even when Jesus bent down to wash their feet, Peter first resisted and then misunderstood the gesture. At the very hour in which the Lord most eagerly desired to eat this supper with them, their confounding ignorance and imperfections were on heightened display. And what was the Lord’s response? *Love*. An “unfeigned love”.<sup>3</sup> Jesus did not have “drum up” an artificial or grudging acceptance of these men – a mere “tolerance”. No. He had already come to love them so much that, in spite of their failures, he was going to “love them to the end”.<sup>4</sup>

It is this love by our Lord – in one way absolutely simple (because it is divine), and in another way completely confounding (because he loved them *humanly* and genuinely) – it is this love of our Lord Jesus that we are invited to contemplate, to admire, to be amazed at, this night. And more than that, to *enter into*. In speaking of the practice of Eucharistic adoration, Pope Francis said that this is what adoration means:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Matthew* 26:45; *Mark* 14:41.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *2 Corinthians* 6:6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *John* 13:1.

“To worship, to immerse yourselves in divine love and give it to those you meet on your path. It is beautiful to worship in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, to be in the consoling presence of Jesus and there to draw the apostolic impetus to be instruments of goodness, tenderness and welcome in the community, in the Church and in the world.”<sup>5</sup>

At the conclusion of this Mass, the Blessed Sacrament will be carried to the place of adoration. Until midnight, many people – perhaps some of you who are here – will observe the custom of visiting various churches to spend time with Jesus in the Eucharist. This is a worthy tradition. Yet to adore the Lord in this way would be missing something – something *essential* – if it were not joined to the kind of love that Jesus modeled for us on that first Holy Thursday night. A love *from the heart*, which makes us ready to give ourselves in humble acts of unity for a sister or brother. A readiness to “die” to the grudge we hold, or to give up a condemning judgment that we make against another person. A willingness to presume the good of a person’s intentions... A choice to forgive.

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The Lord’s persevering love for his sinful Apostles is equaled by his deep and abiding love for you and me: a love which is signified by the washing of the feet, which we will now enact. As we experience this ritual, may we see its connection with the Eucharist – and how both of these actions call us to imitate the genuine, self-giving love of our Lord.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the General Chapters of the Order of the Most Holy Savior of Saint Bridget and the Comboni Missionary Sisters, 22 October 2022.