

Homily for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)
Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Washington, D.C. – April 13, 2017
Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio

Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is good to be with you for this solemn Mass, when we commemorate our Lord's institution of the Holy Eucharist and the sacred priesthood. These two gifts, the Eucharist and the priesthood, ensure that Jesus will be with us until the end of time.

I am happy to convey to you the spiritual closeness of the man who also represents Christ to us in a singular way: our Holy Father, Pope Francis. Earlier, outside of Rome, he celebrated the Mass of the Lord's Supper with prisoners; and, like Jesus, he washed the feet of those who are in need of mercy.

In the opening prayer of this Mass, we thanked God for calling us to participate in the Eucharist, which is a "most sacred Supper", an eternal sacrifice, and a banquet of Christ's love. Then we said to God: "Grant, we pray, that we may draw, from so great a mystery, the fullness of charity and of life."

In the Gospel we just heard, Jesus gave us an example of humble charity when he knelt down to wash the Apostles' feet after feeding them with his Body and Blood. Because of his example, we are compelled to take the charity of Christ—which we receive in the Eucharist—and to give that same charity to the people we meet in the streets and in our daily lives. Having been filled with salvation and love, we must bring love and salvation to others as "missionary disciples".

This is certainly the message of Pope Francis; but it is also the constant teaching of the Church. The Second Vatican Council told us that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life". This "Christian life" is nothing less than a life of love, of mercy, of charity to those who need us. God wants us not only to *receive* the Eucharist, but to *live* the Eucharist. To *live* the Eucharist means to practice concrete works of charity outside these church walls.

The Eucharist compels us to practice charity and service, and above all, the service of evangelization. Referring to today's second reading from Saint Paul to the Corinthians, Pope John Paul II said: "The Apostle closely relates meal and proclamation: entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite." The Pope went on to say: "The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24).

Tonight there will be no dismissal at the end of Mass, because we will immediately take the Blessed Sacrament to its place of repose. We begin a night of vigil with our Lord. Tomorrow we will commemorate his Passion; and then, we will rejoice in his Resurrection at Easter.

By celebrating these events—the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord—our Christian souls are filled with the life and love of God. And because God's life fills us, we are compelled to share that life with the people whom we encounter each day. Sometimes we must give to a person an explicit account of what we believe and why. At other times, we must share the love of Jesus with gestures more than words: by giving material assistance to the needy; by comforting a person who is distressed; or by patiently tolerating someone's anger or insensitivity, without seeking revenge.

No matter how we share the love of Jesus, we can be joyful in knowing that this is how to *live* the Eucharist. Each time we return to Mass to adore God, we can offer him the good works that we have performed in the name of Jesus. Then, we can be renewed once more by his Eucharistic love, which empowers us to return to the world and to give that same love to others. This is what it means to say that the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our whole Christian lives.

Tonight, we remember the institution of this most sacred Supper, this eternal sacrifice, this banquet of Christ's love. May we be filled with the love of God, and may we feed others with that same divine love.