

HOMILY for HOLY THURSDAY – Year ABC

Tonight the Church begins the Triduum of the Holy Week with the celebration of Holy Thursday. Two important things that we do every Holy Thursday are the re-enactment of the Last Supper with our Lord Jesus & His Feet Washing of the twelve apostles. Over the years, the Church has added, subtracted, & made changes to the elements of the Mass to come up with the way we celebrate Mass today. That is, we read three passages from the two parts of the Bible (the Old Testament & the New Testament) & then celebrate the Last Supper with Holy Communion. Each Christian Church tradition might choose to focus on certain elements of the Mass or add a liturgical feature to enhance its own celebration of the Mass. That is why we have seen some churches want to have a charismatic Mass & would pause many times during the service to let worshippers raise up their hands & speak in tongue. Others want to have a concert-like Mass & fill it up with all sorts of music. Or, some clergy think that incense & bells might enhance the worship experience & would focus on those elements for their entire Mass. Others assume that Mass has to be like a political rally & use it to talk about all kinds of political & social issues.

Regardless of how each Christian church & every clergy understands & conducts the Mass, I would like us to see how Jesus carried out His First Mass/Last Supper tonight & wished His disciples to continue that tradition until He comes back. First of all, I want us to look at the seating at the table where the First Mass/Last Supper took place. Jesus had all of His twelve Apostles gather around it. It looks almost like the Thanksgiving dinner table for most American families to meet during the Holidays. He did not invite just His three favorite Apostles – Peter, James, & John to this dinner like He did to a few special occasions before. This time He invited everyone, even Judas who would betray Him & had him sit at the table to share in this sacred meal. That is truly an act of forgiveness & unity that Jesus wanted us to see at the First Mass/Last Supper.

In my years of priesthood, I often hear people say that they are not worthy to participate in the Mass & take Communion because of their sinfulness. Or, recently some priests & bishops have decided to deny Communion to certain Catholic politicians for their refusal to follow Church teachings. I have also received a book published by a group of Catholics & clergy who try to reason & promote such an idea to the whole Christian Church. I don't know if those people have ever studied Church history & seen how painful & unproductive schisms/divisions have done to the Christian community & its assigned mission. If the early Church had grown by leap & bound because of the sacrifices & dedication of all its members, its later generations have fought among themselves & delayed the mission that Jesus asked of them. Many popes have also tried to heal those schisms/divisions & unite those fragmented Christian churches without much success over the years. Let me name some of those Christian groups for us to see: Catholic, Lutheran, Calvin, Anglican, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Christian Reformed, Chaldean Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, & so on. Can you imagine how much good we Christians would do to the world & how proud we Christians would make our Lord feel if we can put aside our differences & intensely focus on the mission that Jesus left behind for us?

Anyway, let me bring you back to what I really want to talk about the Mass. If Jesus could allow Judas to participate in the First Mass/Last Supper, why couldn't we have sinful

politicians & lapsed Catholics participate in the Mass? After all, Jesus is the owner of the Mass, not a clergy or a devout Catholic. Keep in mind that Judas' sin of betrayal is worse than any sin. Jesus even wished that Judas should have never been born. But, only after Judas had participated fully in the Mass did Jesus tell him to go ahead & carry out his sinful act. The Church often talks about the Mass as a sign of unity, but unfortunately it often acts contrary to that statement & keeps people that it does not agree with to participate in that celebration. So, tonight I want to remind us of our Lord's dying wish about the Mass. He wanted the Mass/Last Supper to be a community/family event & wished that we would put aside our differences & experience His unconditional love & personal sacrifice for us. We should not use the Mass as the weapon of punishment & take it away from any Catholic/Christian who might not share the same political & social views with us. For Jesus assures us tonight that ALL of His disciples, including a big sinner like Judas, would have a seat at the Mass/Last Supper with Him.

The second & last point that I want to remind us about the Mass/Last Supper is the importance of humble service to one another after sharing in it as Jesus washed the feet of all the twelve Apostles after that sacred meal. He even left this command to His disciples, "...If I washed your feet – I who am teacher & Lord, then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." Unfortunately, we have seen most Catholics/Christians, especially church leaders, have not lived up to that command & bent down to wash the feet of their neighbors & the misfortunate. They have not been humble & compassionate enough to take care of the poor & the lowly around them. Instead, they've kept looking for power & fame & avoid any act of humble service to the people around them. My friends, it's good for us to attend Mass regularly. But, we can't stop there. We need to complete the whole Mass/Last Supper by stooping down to wash the feet of our neighbors. Can you imagine how we would view Jesus if He did not wash the feet of the Apostles? We would never believe that He would die on the Cross for us and the world.

My dear brothers & sisters, we Catholics often view Mass & Holy Communion to be sacred; & they are. But, we cannot separate the Mass/Last Supper from Jesus' humble act of washing the feet of His disciples. After all, Jesus created the First Mass with the act of humble service & commanded His disciples to do the same. We would honor Him & make Him proud if we would follow His dying wish. So, let's continue to remember Him by trying to celebrate Mass often & most importantly learning to wash the feet of our neighbors.