

March 29, 2018

St. Augustine Cathedral 7:00 p.m.

### **Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper**

Tonight, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper and begin this first part of the Sacred Triduum, we enter into the recollection of, and the participation in, Jesus' saving life, death and Resurrection---what we call the Paschal Mystery.

St. John indicates in this evening's Gospel that we are witnessing a kind of transfer of leadership of His infant Church from Jesus to His dear Apostles. In fact, as we heard St. John tell us, everything was in order, and as we might say, the "stage was set": it was almost the Feast of Passover, Judas had already left the meal to do his despicable deed of betraying Jesus, and *"Jesus knew that His hour had come to pass from this world to the Father"....."He was fully aware that the Father had put everything into His power, and that He had come from God and was going to God"*.

As we hear St. Paul in our Second Reading from the first Letter to the Corinthians tell us, Jesus used the occasion of the Last Supper to provide for us the means by which He would remain with His Church forever, after His ignominious suffering, tortuous Crucifixion, and lingering Death on a Cross, by giving us the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist----that has been and always remains, the unbloody representation of Jesus' Body broken and His Blood poured out for us on Calvary.

And, so that this miraculous Gift could be repeated for all time to come, Jesus "ordained" His Apostles at that same Last Supper, so that they, and all future Priests, would be able to do what Jesus did at the Last Supper, which is what St. Paul recorded for us in that very Reading: *"the Lord Jesus, on the night He was handed over, took bread...broke it, and said: 'This is My Body that is for you....And in the same way, He took the cup, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood....Do this in remembrance of Me.'"*

And so, having given us the greatest of all the Sacraments----His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist to abide with us forever----and the Sacrament of the Priesthood to be able to bring about that great Sacrament about for all believing people for generations to come----Jesus had one more, very important, lesson to teach the Apostles.

The Eucharist would keep us spiritually strong in our Sacramental Union with Jesus Himself, but Jesus knew that His followers needed to do more than be One with Him; the generations of faithful believers in Jesus needed to be willing, ready and able to do what He had done: to love the unlovable; to reach out to those whom the rest of the world ignored or oppressed; to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked and shelter the homeless; to serve the needs of others in the same way that we would do if we were serving Jesus Himself. And so the Holy Eucharist was also to be our spiritual nourishment so that we would be strong enough to do what Jesus was about to show them.

As we heard in our Gospel passage just a few minutes ago, without saying a word, Jesus got up, took off His outer garment, donned an apron, took a basin and a pitcher of water, and washed His Apostles dusty, grimy feet.

And then He asked them: *“Do you realize what I have done for you?”*

That’s a **very** important question for all of us to ponder as we begin this Sacred Triduum, and as we watch with Jesus throughout the time of Adoration this evening, as we walk with Him along His Way of the Cross tomorrow on Good Friday, and keep Vigil with Him during His time when His lifeless Body lay in repose in the Tomb throughout Holy Saturday.

As many Lents as we have experienced in our lifetime, and as many Sacred Triduums that we have participated in, Jesus’ question *“Do you realize what I have done for you?”* remains central for all of us, and the most profound question for which, I hope, we have a good answer.

During these three holy days, we can’t help but think about the historical events that took place 2000 years ago; that’s part of the answer as to whether we realize what Jesus has done for us---as we ponder and reflect on the historical events of Jesus’ suffering, passion and death. But, there’s even more.

Besides remembering what happened in history, we also need to realize what Jesus has done for us in the mystery that reveals for us that every time we gather to celebrate the Mass, we are re-living Jesus’ saving event for us here and now. The Priest says: *“This **is** My Body....This **is** My Blood....Do this in Remembrance of Me!”* Every time we celebrate the Mass, Jesus’ Body is Broken and His Blood is poured out, in an unbloody way, for you, and me, and for all who share belief in the Eucharist. That’s what unites us, and keeps us strong in our Faith.

We don't gather just to remember what happened 2000 years ago; we gather to reenter into what Jesus causes to happen for us here and now. The Eucharist is given to us as people of Faith to call us to an ongoing conversion of mind and heart, and to send us forth on our continuing mission to live lives of holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to serve the needs of those we meet in the example of Jesus.

My dear Family of Faith, each of us needs to be renewed in our Faith in this amazing and wonderful Gift of the Eucharist; we need to take much more seriously what it means for us to faithfully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist at least every week, and as often as we can. When we truly believe that Jesus Himself is Present here among us, in His Word and in an incredibly Real way in the Bread and Wine that becomes for us His Body and Blood, how can we not be filled with thanksgiving and adoration?

In addition, we need to pray for an increase of Priests here in our Diocese so that the Gift of the Eucharist, and all the other celebrations of the Sacraments will be able to be provided for the spiritual well-being of our entire Diocese.

I ask you in a special way to pray for these young men gathered here with us this evening; these are our Seminarians, and we look forward to the day when, God willing, they will be ordained as Priests of Jesus Christ in service to the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo. But, I ask you to pray for an increase of vocations---that more young men will hear the Holy Spirit's prompting to consider this wonderful vocation of being a Priest, so that they can help to draw you closer to Jesus through their ministry.

In this Holy Eucharist, we are called to become Who it is that we receive. And since we receive the Real Body and Blood of Christ, then we are to become other Christ's who must wash one another's feet as Jesus does. This Holy Mass that we are privileged to celebrate is the Sacred Meal that unites us to one another in Jesus our Lord Who makes Himself Present through His Body and Blood as our Food and Drink, and then sends us on our way to serve the needs of those we encounter in His example.

At yesterday's Kalamazoo United gathering down at the corner of Howard St. and Stadium Drive on the grounds of Kalamazoo Christian School, a fairly nice number of Christians from a variety of denominations came together to pray in thanksgiving for the great Feast of Easter which is the central Mystery of Faith for

all Christian people. It was a beautiful time of prayer and thanksgiving, focusing on what unites us, in spite of those realities that divide us. During that time I had a very interesting conversation with a Pastor of a Protestant Church who wanted to talk about our Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. His father had been Catholic, and so he was quite aware of our belief in the Real Presence. I could sense his longing to be able to share in that belief, and he spoke fondly of how great it would be if all Christians could really be united, as he put it, “around the Meal”, which he knew Jesus intended to be our ultimate source of unity. And indeed, that would be wonderful, and we pray for the day that might happen, even as it remains Jesus’ Prayer: “Father, may they all be one as You Father are in Me and I am in You. May we all be one.”

This evening, we praise God for the precious, saving Gift of the Holy Eucharist. We thank God for the Gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. And we hope, and pray, that during this Sacred Triduum, we will truly “realize”, at the depths of our beings, ***what Jesus has done for us*** through the Eucharist, and through our mandate to “do what He did” in washing one another’s feet, to live in loving service of others.

Please join me in praying that through this year’s Sacred Triduum which we have begun, each of us here, and all of us throughout our Diocese, will allow our hearts to be embraced by the totality and unconditional nature of God’s love for us, and help us all to be renewed in our love for Him and for one another.

May we as a Diocese, may all our parishes, and may each of us as Catholics be made strong in our oneness with Jesus, and ready to further Jesus’ Mission to be compassionate in our care for the poor, and fearless in our work for peace and justice, as we confidently live our lives as Joyful Disciples of Jesus, rooted in our Hope in the Resurrection.

God bless you, now and always!