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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
13 April 2006

The Mass of the Lord's Supper

Tonight we gather here in the upper room with the Lord Jesus and his disciples as we prepare to celebrate the great Passover feast. On this night we will be marked with the Blood of the Lamb and his household, the Church, will be saved from death because of his Blood. Tonight, "types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here," newer rites given us by the Savior himself (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Tantum ergo*). Christ gives the definitive meaning and power to the celebration of the Passover and never will it need to be repeated again, for with his own Blood he destroys death forever.

When the Lord gathered his disciples together in the Upper Room he knew well what he intended to do. As St. Paul relates to us, Jesus, the Master and Teacher,

took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (I Corinthians 11:23-25).

In this way his own Body replaces the flesh of the Paschal Lamb and his own Blood replaces the blood of the Paschal Lamb spread on the posts and lintels of the houses. It is precisely through his death on the Cross that he gives his Body and Blood for us

to eat and to drink; through his death he atones for our sins and washing us clean in his own Blood, making us "whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:9). He who is without sin willingly gives his life for us that we, too, might live. "This is love in its most radical form" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12).

This night Jesus knows that one of his own will betray him and for this reason he says to the Apostles, "Not all of you are clean" (John 13:11). "Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father" (John 13:1). The time has come for him to fulfill his mission, to give his life for our redemption and salvation.

In giving us the Eucharist, his very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, before he gives up his life for us, he "loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (John 13:2). Through the Holy Eucharist Jesus desires to remain present with us always, but to do so his sacrificial death needs to be perpetuated and made present in every age and in every place "until he comes" again (I Corinthians 11:26). To achieve this end he established the Apostles and some of his disciples as his priests of the New Covenant sealed in his own Blood.

To these, his priests, he says, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15). As Jesus changed the bread and wine of the Passover meal into his very own Body and Blood given for us, so

he will do through the ministry of his priests. He commands his priests to perpetuate his sacrifice and to bring his love to every corner of world - to a world mortally wounded by sin - through the sacramental life of the Church.

On this night the Lord Jesus institutes the sacrament of the Eucharist and he institutes his Church to carry out his work of salvation always and everywhere. We know that the Eucharist unites each of us with Christ and that the Eucharist gives us the grace we need to daily follow faithfully in the footsteps of the Lord. In this sense, we can say that the Eucharist makes the Church for it strengthens us, cleanses us of venial sin, and unites us with the Lamb of God.

But at the same time, the Eucharist does not simply fall from heaven as the manna did in the desert. No, the Eucharist is given us through the sacramental ministry of the Church through her priests and bishops. We know that without the sacred ministers, without priests and bishops, we cannot have the Eucharist. In this way we can say that the Church makes the Eucharist.

Here, then, we can combine the two into a truly magnificent marvel of God's love for us: "The Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist." This is why the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council call the Eucharist the "source and summit" of the Christian life. The Eucharist gives us life and

sends us forth, yet at the same time it calls us back to be refreshed and rejuvenated again. We must always return to this great fountain of life. The Eucharist and the priesthood and the life of the Church and of every individual Christian are intimately and inseparably bound together through the power and mystery of Christ's love displayed for us in the Eucharist.

Here, then, we can begin to understand the power of Jesus' humility when he washes the feet of his disciples and commands them to do likewise. Remembering this particular aspect of the Last Supper of the Lord calls to mind the centrality of service in the Christian life.

Various elements of service today are often emphasized but rarely are they ever connected with the Eucharist as Jesus clearly does. The Eucharist is, in fact, a call to service and at the same time it is a call that also enables such service. It is a call that ennobles such service. Without the Eucharist, true Christian service - which must always take the form of love of God and love of neighbor - simply is not possible. The Eucharist demands that we love God and our neighbor while at the same time the Eucharist gives us the strength and the grace to love as Christ has first loved us.

In his Encyclical Letter, Pope Benedict reflects on this connection between the Eucharist and service. He writes,

in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Corinthians 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christianity. We become "one body", completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself...Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God" (*Deus caritas est*, 14-15).

On this night when we celebrate the institution of the Eucharist and of the priesthood, let us beg the Lord to fill each of us with his love, that we might then love others as he has first loved us and so come to love him fully. Through the Eucharist and through the Christian service of love may we come a greater unity with one another and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.