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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois  
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The Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

In his Message for Lent 2007, The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI invited us to "live Lent, then, as a 'Eucharistic' time in which, welcoming the love of Jesus, we learn to spread it around us with every word and deed. Contemplating 'Him whom they have pierced' moves us in this way to open our hearts to others..."

Tonight as Jesus gives us his great model of love and opens his heart for us, he also institutes both the Eucharist and the Priesthood of the new and eternal covenant, sealed in His own Blood. So deeply does Jesus love humanity that, on the eve of His Passion and Death, he gives us the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Priesthood to perpetuate His Presence among us until He comes at last in glory.

Saint John tells us that Jesus "loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Jesus did not desire to abandon humanity in its sin to the power of death; rather, he gave his life that we might live. In Jesus Christ we learn most profoundly that

God loves his creature, man; he even loves him in his fall and does not leave him to himself. He loves him to the

end. He is impelled with his love to the very end, to the extreme: he came down from his divine glory.<sup>1</sup>

As we celebrate this Last Supper of the Lord, we know that our "Master and Teacher" (John 13:14)

cast aside the raiment of his divine glory and put on the garb of a slave. He came down to the extreme lowliness of our fall. He kneels down before us and carries out for us the service of a slave: he washes our dirty feet so that we might be admitted to God's banquet and be made worthy to take our place at his table - something that on our own we neither could nor would ever be able to do.<sup>2</sup>

What wondrous love is this! He whom the angels adore and from whom the demons flee stoops down to us in humble love.

God is not a remote God, too distant or too great to be bothered with our trifles. Since God is great, he can also be concerned with small things. Since he is great, the soul of man, the same man, created through eternal love, is no small thing but great, and worthy of God's love.<sup>3</sup>

Here we learn that "God's holiness is not merely an incandescent power before which we are obliged to withdraw,

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily 13 April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

terrified. It is a power of love and therefore a purifying and healing power."<sup>4</sup>

God descends and becomes a slave, he washes our feet so that we may come to his table. In this, the entire mystery of Jesus Christ is expressed. In this, what redemption means becomes visible.

The basin in which he washes us is his love, ready to face death. Only love has that purifying power which washes the grime from us and elevates us to God's heights."

The basin that purifies us is God himself, who gives himself to us without reserve - to the very depths of his suffering and death. He is ceaselessly this love that cleanses us; in the sacraments of purification - Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance - he is continually on his knees at our feet and carries out for us the service of a slave, the service of purification, making us capable of God.<sup>5</sup>

To his Apostles 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). These words the Savior continues to speak today

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

as he continually calls out, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). These Twelve followed him, abandoning everything because of him who called, not fully knowing why. Something about him captivated them; his call they could not resist.

To these Twelve he entrusted his teaching and ministry. Through these Twelve Jesus would continually stoop down to wash the filth of sin from humanity's tired feet. Through these Twelve Jesus called others to follow him and entrusted his mission to them. In every age and in every place, the call of the Lord has gone out: "Follow me" (Mark 2:14).

That call resounds even to this very day, right here in Shumway and in every part of the world. This call of the Lord to share in his priestly ministry is, really, an invitation to love, to extend the tremendous love of God to frail humanity. It is a call to allow Christ the Lord to stoop down through a man's own body to heal and cleanse sinful mankind through the Sacraments administered in love.

This same invitation Jesus extended to Judas, son of the Iscariot, but he refused this invitation of love. This is why Jesus said, "so you are clean, but not all of you" (John 13:10). What made Judas unclean, you ask?

It is this rejection of love, not wanting to be loved, not loving. It is pride that believes it has no need of any

purification, that is closed to God's saving goodness. It is pride that does not want to admit or recognize that we are in need of purification.

In Judas we see the nature of this rejection even more clearly. He evaluated Jesus in accordance with the criteria of power and success. For him, power and success alone were real; love did not count. And he was greedy: money was more important than communion with Jesus, more important than God and his love.<sup>6</sup>

You who sit here in our midst, whom the Lord is calling to follow him the priesthood, do not be like Judas! Do not let your hearts be hardened and formed by the standards of the world! Let your hearts be open to him who is Love. Let his intriguing invitation, "Follow me," resound within your ears and your heart.

Allow the Lord to bend down and wash your feet, to cleanse you of your sin through the Sacraments. Let him use you to do the same for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus longs to reach out his loving arm through yours; through you, he wants to lift humanity up to behold his face, to look upon his love and to know his peace. Give your life in service to him!

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

You whom the Lord calls - you know who you are: will you make his people wait even longer to receive his mercy and experience his love? I urge you in his name, take up the basin and towel and follow him! Go where he leads and help him wash the feet of mankind. Do not be afraid to follow Christ, to reject the wealth and power of this world, for in Christ alone will you find your joy, your peace, and your fulfillment! Amen!