



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of St John Lateran
Holy Thursday, 13 April 2006*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate
and in the Priesthood,*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"
(Jn 13: 1).

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. He 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 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. 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 not a small thing but great, and worthy of God's love. God's holiness is not merely an incandescent power before which we are obliged to withdraw, terrified. It is a power of love and therefore a purifying and healing power.

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 his 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.

His love is inexhaustible, it truly goes to the very end. *"You are clean, but not all of you"*, the Lord says (Jn 13: 10). This sentence reveals the great gift of purification that he offers to us, because he wants to be at table together with us, to become our food. *"But not all of you"* - the obscure mystery of rejection exists, which becomes apparent with Judas' act, and precisely on Holy Thursday, the day on which Jesus made the gift of himself, it should give us food for thought. The Lord's love knows no bounds, but man can put a limit on it.

"You are clean, but not all of you": What is it that makes man unclean? It is the 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. He thus also became a liar who played a double game and broke with the truth; one who lived in deceit and so lost his sense of the supreme truth, of God. In this way, he became hard of heart and incapable of conversion, of the trusting return of the Prodigal Son, and he disposed of the life destroyed. *"You are clean, but not all of you"*. Today, the Lord alerts us to the self-sufficiency that puts a limit on his unlimited love. He invites us to imitate his humility, to entrust ourselves to it, to let ourselves be "infected" by it. He invites us - however lost we may feel - to return home, to let his purifying goodness uplift us and enable us to sit at table with him, with God himself. Let us add a final word to this inexhaustible Gospel passage: *"For I have given you an example"* (Jn 13: 15); *"You also ought to wash one another's feet"* (Jn 13: 14). Of what does "washing one another's feet" consist? What does it actually mean? This: every good work for others - especially for the suffering and those not considered to be worth much - is a service of the washing of feet. The Lord calls us to do this: to come down, learn humility and the courage of goodness, and also the readiness to accept rejection and yet to trust in goodness and persevere in it. But there is another, deeper dimension. The Lord removes the dirt from us with the purifying power of his goodness. Washing one another's feet means above all tirelessly forgiving one another, beginning together ever anew, however pointless it may seem. It means purifying one another by bearing with one another and by being tolerant of others; purifying one another, giving one another the sanctifying power of the Word of God and introducing one another into the Sacrament of divine love. The Lord purifies us, and for this reason we dare to approach his table. Let us pray to him to give to all of us the grace of being able to one day be guests for ever at the eternal nuptial banquet. Amen!

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