



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 1 April 1999

1. *"Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, Quae sub his figuris vere latitas". "Devoutly I adore you, hidden Deity, under these appearances concealed".*

This evening we relive the Last Supper when, on the night he was betrayed, the divine Saviour left us the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and his Blood, the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity and a bond of charity (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 47).

The readings of this celebration all speak of rites and actions destined to imprint upon history the saving plan of God. The Book of Exodus passes on the priestly document which establishes the regulations for celebrating the Jewish Passover. The Apostle Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, passes on to the Church the most ancient testimony of the new Christian paschal Supper: it is the rite of the new and everlasting Covenant, instituted by Jesus in the Upper Room before the Passion. Finally, John the Evangelist, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, summarizes the profound meaning of Christ's immolation in the act of the "washing of feet".

It is the Passover of the Lord, which is rooted in the history of the people of Israel and finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God sacrificed for our salvation.

2. The Church lives by the Eucharist. Thanks to the ministry of the Apostles and their successors, in an uninterrupted series which begins in the Upper Room, Christ's words and actions are renewed, following the Church's journey, in order to offer the Bread of life to the men and women of each generation: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor

11:24-25).

As a sacramental renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross, the Eucharist is the summit of the work of redemption: it proclaims and brings about that mystery which is the source of life for every person. In fact, every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26).

After the consecration, the priest proclaims: "*Mysterium fidei!*", and the people respond "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again".

Yes, today we are given to understand in a special way that the "mystery of the faith" is truly great, and the simplicity of the Eucharistic symbols - the bread and wine, the table, the fraternal banquet - serve only to give greater emphasis to its depth.

3. "*O memoriale mortis Domini! Panis vivus, vitam praestans homini!*". "O memorial of the Lord's sad death! Show life to man, O living Bread!".

The death of the Son of God becomes the source of life for us. This is the paschal mystery, this is the new creation! The Church professes this faith with the words of Thomas Aquinas, imploring:

*"Pie Pellicane, Iesu Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine,
Cuius una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere".*

"Jesus Lord, my Pelican devout,
with your Blood my sins dismiss:
one single drop could surely save
from sin this world's dark edifice".

The life-giving power of Christ's death! The purifying power of Christ's blood, which obtains the forgiveness of sins for the people of all times and all places. The sublimeness of the redemptive sacrifice, in which all the victims of the ancient law find fulfilment!

4. This mystery of love, "incomprehensible" to the human being, is offered in its entirety in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Christians are invited to pause before it this evening, even late into the night, in silent adoration:

*"Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio:
Ut, te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae".*

"Jesus, whom now I see enveiled,

what I desire, when will it be?
Beholding your fair face revealed,
your glory shall I be blessed to see.
Amen".

This is the Church's faith. This is the faith of each one of us before the sublime Eucharistic mystery. Yes, may words cease and adoration endure. In silence.

"Ave, verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine....

"Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary,
which truly underwent the Passion, immolated upon the Cross for humanity....
O sweet Jesus! O loving Jesus!
O Jesus, Son of Mary!".

Amen!

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