

**Homily for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper  
April 13, 2017**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield**

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

The Lord Jesus, on the night He was handed over, 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."<sup>1</sup>

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here, for tonight we begin the sacred Triduum: three holy days that culminate in the celebration of Christ's resurrection. We devote ourselves to the remembrance of the Paschal Mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ and we place ourselves in humble service to others as Jesus commanded His disciples to do.

Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus gathered the disciples whom He loved to share one last meal. It was not just any meal but a meal that celebrated the Passover of the Lord and the freedom of the Israelite people from their slavery in Egypt. Rather than just commemorating this freedom

from physical slavery, Our Lord, knowing that the following day He would be the Spotless Passover Lamb when He offered His life on the altar of the Cross, changed the script from something that would be familiar to any observant Jew into something altogether different. For He had not come to free us from a physical slavery, but rather to free us from our slavery to sin and death. Therefore, to fortify us with His grace, during the course of that meal Jesus gave those gathered with Him one of His greatest gifts: the gift of His Most Holy Body and Most Precious Blood in the Eucharist.

Our late Holy Father, Saint John Paul II, truly understood this importance of the Eucharist as our point of connection to God, in which our Lord comes to meet and strengthen us for our lives of faith. Not only was the Eucharist the foundation for his life and service to the Church, but Saint John Paul II spent a substantive portion of his ministry teaching us about the importance of the Eucharist in our lives. Time and time again, in his writings and teachings he conveyed that “Only through the Eucharist is it possible to live the heroic virtues of Christianity” and that we “must always be Eucharistic souls in order to be Christians.” May we strive to follow the example of Saint John Paul II and, on this most holy night when

the Church throughout the world celebrates our reception of the gift of the Eucharist which is the very source and summit of our faith, let us seek to form an ever-deeper connection to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

My dear brothers and sisters, it would have been enough for Jesus to come as the Messiah, to give His disciples the gift of Himself in the Eucharist, and to die in order that we might be freed from sin and death, thus making us heirs to eternal life. However, our Lord in His loving providence gave us another gift. He gave us the gift of His Sacred Priesthood and, in doing so, He ensured that the sacrifice that He would offer to the Father on the altar of the Cross the very next day might be carried out on the altars of His Church for the salvation of souls until His return in glory.

As we gather here tonight to celebrate the connection between the gifts of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ, we are privileged to be joined by the seminarians of this diocese who will one day, God willing, be members of that sacred priesthood. Tonight, as we commemorate that Last Supper in which Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, it could not be more fitting that I have the privilege of washing

the feet of the men who will one day unite their lives to that of Jesus through their sharing in His Priesthood in collaboration with their bishop.

To you my dear sons, it is my hope that in these next days, as we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ, He might give you the grace to understand more fully the intimate connection between the most holy Eucharist and your role as future priests of the Church, for the Eucharist is “the principal and central [reason for the existence] of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist.”<sup>2</sup>

Today’s scripture passage from the Gospel of Saint John about Jesus washing the feet of His disciples also shows the essential connection between the Eucharist and Christian service. At the time of Jesus, feet were washed for several reasons: it could be a simple act of hygiene, it could serve as a gesture of hospitality in welcoming guests, and it could serve as a ritual act of religious devotion. Peter objects because he misinterprets Jesus’ action as merely a cleansing of the feet for hygienic reasons. Jesus explains that there is a deeper reason in that His washing of the disciples’ feet is a saving action. Without it Peter will have no inheritance with Jesus.

The term “inheritance” designates a full saving relationship with Jesus. To have an inheritance with Jesus is to participate fully in His life.

Notice also that Jesus washes the feet of His disciples after He rose from supper. After giving the bread and wine to His disciples as His body and blood, Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). After washing their feet, Jesus said, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). This is called the *mandatum* in Latin because it is Jesus’ mandate that His disciples do as He did. Jesus is saying through His words as well as His actions that we are to do these actions of love – the Eucharist and service – in memory of Him and in imitation of Him.

Therefore, as the Church keeps watch with our Lord tonight, I encourage you in your prayers to reflect on the extraordinary gift that Jesus gives a priest in his ability to stand in Christ’s place and offer the Eucharistic sacrifice for the salvation of souls and to pour out his life for the sake of his spiritual flock through his priestly ministry. In doing so, the priest unites his prayers to those of Our Lord as He offered Himself to the Father as the perfect sacrifice on the Cross.

So, as we begin this sacred time of remembrance of the Paschal Mystery of our Lord with this celebration of the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist, may God give us the grace to have an ever-deeper love and devotion to His real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Let us also pray, as we commemorate the establishment of the ministerial priesthood, that the Lord will give more men the courage, grace and strength they need to follow His will in their lives and respond in love to His call for them to become sharers in the His Sacred Priesthood.

As we bring our gifts to the altar, may we recall this special night when Jesus gave us His body and blood, and showed us what it means to serve one another.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenaes*, 24 February 1980, n. 2.