

**Homily for Holy Thursday
Mass of the Lord's Supper
by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
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And he loved them to the end. On the eve of Jesus' total gift of himself on the Cross, he asked for a supper with his disciples, a supper which was to be his last.

And the love of his heart was poured out for them. But for us too for he said do this in memory of me.

This bread is my body, this wine is my blood, eat and drink. A memorial meal, a meal reflecting the Cross and resurrection that was about to happen soon after in Jerusalem.

More than any time in history, we who are afflicted by the uncertainty of this pandemic, the loss of family and friends, the fear of infection, the total upset of our lives, we truly need the assurance of the love of Christ here and now at the beginning of this holy triduum: the three holiest days of the year for every Christian.

Having loved his own, he loved them to the end. These words more than any other reveal the Eucharistic heart of Jesus Christ. He is the friend who lays down his life for his friends. He cares so much that not only he suffers for us in his Passion but dies and comes to life again to bring total liberation for us: all his great Redemption pouring out his blood for us. But more than this, He wanted to leave us a sacrament, a living and perpetual sacrament, a very effective living sign, to renew again and again his redemption with us - the Eucharist, the Mass!

It is grace after grace, love and more love, redemption for sure and the sacrament of redemption in surplus of abundant grace. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the paschal mystery.

Chapter 13 of the Gospel of St. John relates for us a gesture of Jesus that is literally shocking. He who is the Master and Teacher takes the role of a slave and washes the feet of the disciples. A visible descent! His divine head touches the feet of the fishermen! But today, he comes to the hospital beds of those infected with coronavirus, kneeling to gaze upon them with love, today, it is his love that comes to those families who cry because their beloved has passed away without their farewell, today he comes before these heroic doctors and nurses, and hospital staff who risk their lives to heal the sick and accompany the dying. It is the Suffering Servant of the Lord who is not indifferent to such pain but joins in service and love, as if saying to each: I love you, be not afraid, I am with you always.

This Gospel takes notice of Peter who can not stand that the Master washes his feet. What Peter does not grasp is that he does not allow Jesus to love him. Every teenager can understand this for at times it is not easy to understand the care of Mom or Pop for me, perhaps the teen prefers his or her independence or autonomy by moving away. We are all like this. I am like this at times. But like Peter we learn Jesus' way, each of us needs to allow the other to love us and to tame us so that there may be more tenderness in our midst, for love is gentle, kind, it is never rude. The love of Christ is always humble in the manner of the Lord who washes our feet in spite of our reluctance.

Do this in memory of me. The Last Supper became by the desire of Jesus a perpetual meal. The Mass is celebrated over the altars of the world again and again incessantly out of Jesus' empowering mandate to his apostles and his successors throughout all generations. Today, I thank our priests serving our parishes, hospitals, schools, colleges and universities. Priests of God, by your yes you bring the Lord to our altars, you feed the faithful of Jesus Christ with the bread of Heaven, you bring the viaticum to the sick. Each day of your life matters to us all. Holy Thursday is the day of your priesthood, the source of your dedicated life in care of the faithful.

He loved us to the end, do you believe it?