

## Good Friday of the Lord's Passion + 29 March 2024

It's important to recall that the Sacred Paschal Triduum, or "3 days", is really one liturgy divided only by time; liturgies that allow us to enter into the most important events in the history of this world. Last night, we gathered with the Lord in the upper room, where Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and then instituted the Most Holy Eucharist. We heard St. John frame these events in his Gospel by saying that Jesus *loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end*. Today, we will begin to see exactly what *love to the end* looks like.

It was not enough for Jesus just to wash the disciples' feet. As we said last night, while this was an incredible act of humility for the Lord of the universe to do, and the model of life for us to follow, He would bow even lower. It was not enough even for Jesus to institute the Holy Eucharist. As we said last Sunday, His words, *this is my body that is for you* would remain without meaning, were he to merely celebrate this yearly Passover observance and then get on with his daily activities, just as any other pilgrim would do. No, these events are only the beginning; they prepare for and give meaning to His final Passover, His *love to the end*.

In choosing the Cross, Jesus washes not only our feet but our very selves, body and soul, with His precious blood. We can and we must serve one another, but we cannot save one another. Only the spotless Lamb of God can save us. In choosing the Cross, Jesus injects His words over the bread and wine with a reality that should never cease to fill us with wonder and awe: the elements truly become His body and blood; a body which was sacrificed for us on the Cross. This is a sacrifice of love that even the martyrs and heroes of our nation who paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep us free could not achieve. Because Jesus, the only sinless one who needed no savior, took our place: He paid the debt of our sins so that we could be set free. The Cross of Christ is what love to the end looks like: it is not just actions, it is not just words, but rather a *life* completely given, *for us*. And yet, even the Cross looks forward to something greater, something we could never dare to hope for on our own.

The Sacred Paschal Triduum will reach its pinnacle tomorrow night at the Easter Vigil: where we will see the fruit of Jesus' love to the end on the Cross: His resurrection—a resurrection that He did not keep for Himself but shares with all who believe and are Baptized. But we are not there yet. Today, as our stunning high altar so beautiful depicts, we need to remain at the Cross with the Blessed Mother, with St. Mary Magdalene, and St. John. We linger here in order to allow the depth of God's love to begin to melt away our self-love, our indifference to the One who died to save us. We linger here in order to "adore" the Cross, which means to meditate on the sign of God's love to the very end, and to worship the One who willingly embraced it for us.

And yet, I think sometimes there might be a little fear to remain here. Perhaps we fear that if we truly allowed the depths of Christ's love to sink into our souls, it would just be too much for us. Perhaps we fear that the Lord may ask us to change our lives, do something we are not comfortable doing, to act in ways that our friends and families might think are "just too religious." Perhaps we fear perfect love, divine mercy and eternal life—fearing it is all just too good to be true. We may wonder how can we possibly make any sort of human response to Cross of the Lord? In the face of such fears, and maybe even some doubts, perhaps the best thing we can do is listen to the Lord's final words to us on the Cross.

*"I thirst."* Obviously Jesus would have had a human thirst on the Cross. But this paled in comparison to His divine thirst for us. There is a legend that says St. Francis of Assisi went through towns pounding on doors and crying out in sorrow, *"love is not loved!"* Our studies of psychology, sociology, our art, literature, you name it, reveals that the greatest desire, or even need of the human person is for authentic love. And yet when Christ offers such love to us, so often, it is met with a "I wonder what is on Netflix?" Jesus thirsts for you!

*"It is finished,"* or in Latin, *consummatum est*: it is consummated! The marriage of God with man is consummated! God's plan of salvation is complete! He has given Himself to us completely—like a bridegroom gives himself completely to his bride. And that prayer Christ spoke to the Father over the bread and wine the night before has taken on a reality that is so wonderful that the vast majority of non-Catholic Christians, and sadly even some Catholics, do not believe it: *This is my body, this is the chalice of my blood. Given up for you, poured out for you, for the forgiveness of sins.* The Eucharist and the Cross are one: it is Jesus' love for the world *to the end*. But it is a love that thirsts to be received, to be loved in return, to find a home in a human heart so that it can take root, be shared and multiplied, and bear the fruit of eternal life, all for the glory of God.