

**HOMILY FOR HOLY THURSDAY (MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER) AT HOLY
CROSS CATHEDRAL, MISSION ROAD, BENIN CITY, APRIL 18, 2019**

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Praise be to God for the gift of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Priesthood to the Church; two great sacraments of inestimable value. This evening's liturgy my dear people of God, is called the feast of the Last Supper where in we recall the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the Priesthood. Today my dear friends we begin the ***Paschal Triduum***. Triduum is a Latin word that means 'three days'. These three days are the most sacred in the Church's liturgical calendar and the backbone of our Christian faith. In fact the Church's year reaches its peak in the Easter Triduum. It begins with the evening mass of the Lord's Supper, reaches its high point in the Easter vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. Our presence this evening for the Mass of the Lord's Supper means that the season of Lent has drawn to a close. Hopefully our Lenten observances have renewed us in mind and heart so that we might enter more deeply into the paschal mystery of Christ's Passion, death and Resurrection.

On the Readings (Ex. 12:1-8,11-14, 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Jn.13:1-15)

The readings of today recall the ancient Jewish Passover meal which Christ gloriously transforms into the Sacrament of His Body and Blood; it recants the institution of the sacred priesthood and it calls us to fraternal charity. The first reading from the Book of Exodus speaks of the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt. God commanded the Israelites to kill a lamb and mark their door posts with the blood of the lamb and promises to pass over their houses when he strikes down every first-born in the land of Egypt. The Second Reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians recants the Institution of the Eucharist. While the Gospel reading recalls the action of Jesus following the Passover meal with his disciples. He stoops down to wash their feet and gave them a new commandment of love.

Institution of the Holy Eucharist

Tonight my dear people of God we recall with awe and gratitude the institution of the Eucharist on the night before Jesus' death. St. Paul in the Second Reading recalls Jesus' loving transformation of the bread and wine into his body and blood. In the Eucharist Christ perpetuates his presence in

the Church. He offers Himself in the most wonderful way. At every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we participate in a marvelous miracle, the miracle called Transubstantiation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this miracle when it says:

“The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend. In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained. This presence is called real - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be real too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present”.
(Catechism of the Catholic Church #1374).

Our belief in the Real Presence must permeate all of our actions when we are in church. Sacred silence, reverent genuflections and proper attire for worship are all manifestations of deep reverence and faith. How quickly the tradition of genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament as soon as we enter the church or pass in front of the tabernacle, has faded away because we are no longer conscious of Christ's presence in the tabernacle. What has happened to the silence we observe when we immediately enter the church that we even begin to whisper so as not to 'disturb Jesus'? Some of us have turned the church into a place where we finish up our gists and even make phone calls and chat on WhatsApp. My dear people of God, Christ is really and truly present in the Blessed Eucharist and our gestures, attitudes and dispositions at mass and when we enter the church speaks volume about how truly we reverence the Sacred Body and Blood of Jesus. We must also keep in mind the grave importance to receive Holy Communion in the state of grace. To be in a state of Grace is to be free from Mortal Sin. The Catholic Church teaches us that there are three conditions necessary for a mortal sin to exist, they are: the object must be **Grave Matter** (when the act itself is

intrinsically evil and immoral); **Full Knowledge** (The person must know that what he/she is doing or planning to do is evil and immoral) and **Deliberate Consent** (The person must freely choose to commit the act or plan to do it). So we must thoroughly examine our consciences before we come forward to receive Holy Communion.

Institution of the Sacred Priesthood

In order to ensure that the Eucharist remains with us for all time till He comes again, Jesus instituted the sacred priesthood. ‘Do this in memory of Me’ was the formula of institution. Only an ordained priest therefore can validly confect the Eucharist, that is, change the Bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus during consecration. Here in lies the relationship between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. One cannot exist without the other. No priesthood no Eucharist. No Eucharist, No priesthood. The Priest is only a priest because he celebrates mass. And he is called to celebrate the mass worthily according to the mind of the church. So no priest can decide not to celebrate mass if he is not dispensed by the church or decide to add or subtract any part of the mass.

I call on all of us today to pray for your priests. At the Chrism Mass earlier, they renewed their priestly vows and commitments before me their Bishop. We must continue to pray that they may remain faithful to the calling they have received. The idea of gathering together to talk against your priests or to lead them astray must stop. The priest is a representative of Christ. He belongs to Christ and to Christ alone. We must not distract them from their duties but aid them to serve us better. Let us cultivate the habit of advising them and asking for their well being. When was the last time you asked your priest “how are you Father”? Did you sleep well Father? Little kind gestures shown to your priests will go a long way to encourage them to serve you better.

The Call to Fraternal Charity: Love and Service

Today’s liturgy also calls us to Fraternal Charity. It calls us to love and serve our brothers and sisters. We heard in our Gospel passage of today what was at the center of what Jesus did for all of us: “He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. (Jn. 13, 2). Jesus loved us, He still loves us. The love of Jesus for us has no limits; it is always to the end. He never tires of loving anyone. He loves all of us to the point of giving His life for us all on the

cross. The love of Jesus never deceives because he never tires of loving, as He also never tires of forgiving, He never tires of embracing us. My dear people of God I assure you today that Jesus loves each one of you and will always be there to protect and guide you.

To show us how to love limitlessly he performs a rare gesture: He took on the role of a slave to wash the feet of his disciples. At that time it was customary to have a bowl of water at the entrance of the house for the Jews to wash their feet. But it was not done by the head of the household; it was done by the slaves; for it was the duty of the slave to wash his master's feet when he returns from a journey. And Jesus assumes the position of a slave to clean the feet of the disciples. In the culture of the day also, washing of the feet was a welcome into the home and life of the one performing the washing. It becomes for Jesus a profound offering of intimacy and communion. This is re-enacted not just when we celebrate our Eucharist, but also when we gather to share what we have, when we do even small things that speak of human dignity and hope.

And Jesus says to his disciples: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (Jn. 13:7). By this command Jesus underlines the importance of Charity and selfless service. He tells us that fraternal charity is the quickest way to follow God most closely and the quickest way to find Jesus. The way we treat those around us is the feature by which we will be known as his disciples. Our degree of union with him will be seen in our understanding of others and in the way we are of service to them. Let love and not hate, be at the heart of our relationships and let us see ourselves as being responsible for one another. It is only when we are able to do this that we will be able to put an end to the evils we sometimes harbor in our hearts; that we will be able to stop the hate speeches; that we will be able to stop taking the life of another; that we will be able to give our very selves for the sake of others.

Moreover dear friends, the ceremony of foot-washing today points to a deeper reality – our vocation to serve in whatever way we can the poor, the prisoner, the lonely, the bereaved, the sick, the disturbed, the less privileged, the orphans, the widows/widowers and all who undergo one challenge or the

other in our midst; for when we serve them we serve Christ. This attitude of service should also be emulated by our Leaders. Those in authority must use their power to show love and service. Jesus reminds us that those with true power are servants of others without power. Jesus overturns the cultural and societal norms. How many servants are praised and admired? If we become a servant like Jesus what will happen to our prestige, power and honour? What will people think of us if we stooped so low to be of service to those 'beneath us'? I enjoin us today to do something good for those who serve us. You're your cook out for Easter and buy him or her a good meal. Take your driver to the movies and let your cleaner get a good treat at Easter. This is what Jesus precisely asks of his disciples. Leaders truly serve if they use their power to bring smiles to the faces of those they serve. People will gladly follow a leader who is humble and who serves. People will follow a leader who tells the truth about the state of things. People will follow a leader who has the interest of those he serves at heart.

CONCLUSION

So my dear brothers and sisters as we celebrate today's liturgy, let us endeavour to remain with Jesus on the altar of repose for at least an hour. And as we go home today let us take time to recall the incredible love that Jesus has for all of us. His love was poured out for us through the sacrifice he made on the cross and daily through the Eucharist. We know that we can count on Jesus' love for us each day, especially as we receive communion, and that he will strengthen us as we continue our pilgrimage of faith, love and service. May God our Father through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary help us always seek the grace to recognize and appreciate our oneness with Christ, our oneness through the Eucharist, and grant us the grace to live out this oneness by means of our love for one another through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God bless you all