

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
HOLY THURSDAY
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
MARCH 20, 2008

My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and members of the Diaconate formation community, parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral Cluster:

This morning we gathered here in the Cathedral to celebrate the blessing of the Holy Oils and the consecration of the Sacred Chrism. We did so in the setting of the Holy Eucharist, thus reminding us that the Holy Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the whole Christian life and, therefore, all the sacraments flow from the Holy Eucharist. Tonight we remember in a very vivid way the connection between the Holy Eucharist and all Christian ministry. We celebrate the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the institution of the command of brotherly love.

As we can clearly see from the Gospels, the Last Supper was celebrated in the context of a Passover meal. Jesus took the normal symbols of the Jewish Passover and gave them a new significance: the unleavened bread now represented His own Body, the true Passover food, and the cup of benediction at the end of the meal became the cup of His Blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant.

Just as Christ gave new significance to a rite that was already well established, in much the same way, we continue to repeat the ritual that the Lord

left us, but every time we do so, we find something “new” within it. In the Christian life, nothing is mere repetition but, rather, because of the power of the Holy Spirit, God is always providing new insights into the gift of His healing and renewing presence.

As we look to the past and recall the Jewish Passover experience and the Last Supper of Christ with His apostles, these memories come alive for us tonight in a new way; we believe that we share in one same sacrificial meal in communion with the Church of every time and place, stretching back to Jesus and the twelve apostles.

This Holy Thursday is different from last Holy Thursday, or Holy Thursdays we hope to celebrate in years to come. There is some new way we are encountering the Lord as we enter into His sacrificial death and glorious Resurrection. We experience anew His mercy and forgiveness and find new reason for hope, new energy for service. There are always new reasons to celebrate and new hungers to satisfy.

Just as every Holy Eucharist brings to life the memory of the Last Supper, every Holy Eucharist also points us toward the banquet of life eternal when sacraments shall cease and we will truly be one with the Lord and each other in His Kingdom. In this sense, as the Fathers of the Church taught, the Holy Eucharist helps us “remember the future,” and fills us with new hope. St. Thomas Aquinas

once spoke of the Holy Eucharist as “*Spes Gloriam*,” that is, our hope of glory. In this mystery, we begin to experience – already now – the dawning of our hope for a full and perfect communion with the Lord. As St. Paul reminds us in today’s second reading, “*As often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.*”

One of the famous German Scripture scholars of the last century, Monsignor Schurman, has noted that Jesus did make one innovation in the way He celebrated the Passover ritual: instead of each participant drinking from his own cup, Jesus designated one cup – His own – and all were to drink from that one cup. That is, all the disciples were to share His life and His destiny. We, too, drink of the one cup and so celebrate our unity with the Lord and each other – something we experience here sacramentally and something we pledge to live as we go forth from this Holy Eucharist.

These thoughts bring me to the second point: tonight we also remember the Lord’s command to love one another as He has loved us. It is very fitting that we have here in the Cathedral this evening members of the diaconate community who are preparing to give their lives as servants of Word, Sacrament, and charity. Tonight’s Gospel shows us what our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has called “hope-in-action,” the act of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. Not only was this a very humbling thing for the teacher to wash the feet of His disciples, it also

represents the rich theological teaching that we cannot save ourselves. We must be washed by the Lord; we must be immersed into His Paschal Mystery.

It is important to note that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in the course of the Passover meal, that is, during the supper itself. Again here, we see the intimate connection between Christian service and the sacrificial meal of the Holy Eucharist. All Christian ministry flows from the Holy Eucharist and must lead us and those we serve back to the Lord's presence in this great sacrament. As we share of the one bread and the one cup, we are united with the Lord and each other, sharing in His life and destiny. We truly become one body and one spirit in the Lord.

This evening, let us rejoice in this gift of the Holy Eucharist and the institution of the command of brotherly love, gifts that are necessarily connected to one another, gifts we are privileged to share, gifts that are ever-new each time we celebrate this holy meal. Amen.