

Maundy Thursday: The Mass of the Lord's Supper

9th April 2020

Albert Einstein, one of the world's great minds, didn't wake up one day and say to himself I think I'll be intelligent and create numerous mathematical theories and solutions today. No, Einstein had to learn, he had to be taught, he had to be formed. All of us hopefully want to know Jesus not just superficially but intimately and deeply, we want to be his disciples. Before we can even attempt to do this we have to know what it means then to be a follower and therefore we have to learn and be formed by Jesus our teacher. This Holy Thursday we enter the Lord's school of love (all be it spiritually this year!) and our classroom will be the upper room where Jesus will celebrate the Passover with the Twelve, and teach us his students the lessons of true discipleship.

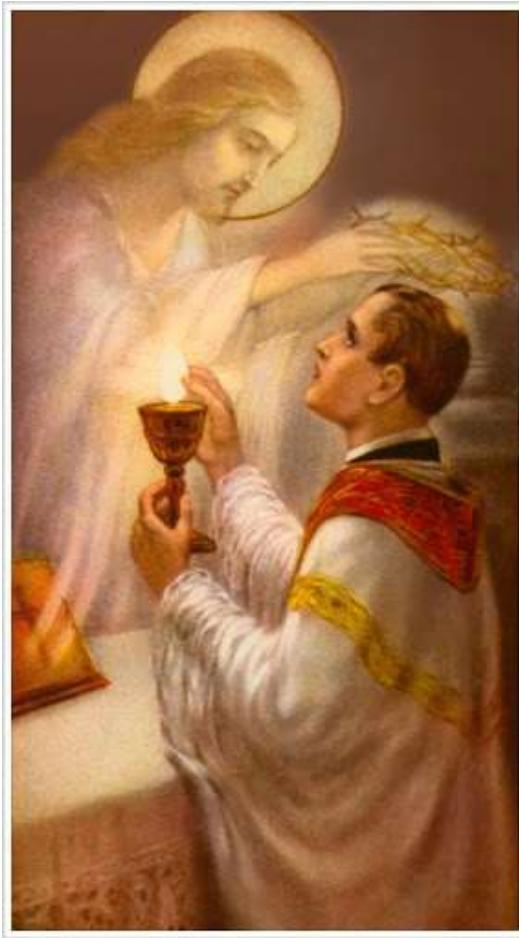


Part One: '*I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.*' (Jn 13:15)

The first lesson is washing the disciples feet. Our Lord, fully divine and fully human, humbly sank to his knees and washed the muck and the dirt and the filth from his follower's feet. To put it another way, God in flesh and blood, himself no less, washed the feet of a fishermen called Peter, he washed the feet of a tax collector called Matthew, he washed the feet of a traitor called Judas! He -the Word made Flesh – washed his disciples feet to teach us about real love. Love that

means humbling ourselves before others and serving them no matter what! Even if they are a friend or enemy, a brother/sister or a traitor, a believer or a doubter. To be a disciple and to know Jesus is to act in this way.

I find this hard. My ego and pride find this hard, yet if Our Lord gives us this example, then to be a good disciple means to embrace this way of love. Normally at the evening Mass I would remove my priestly vestment, the chasuble, and get on my hands and knees before twelve people sitting on the sanctuary and wash their feet in imitation of Jesus Christ the Servant-King. It is not some empty ritual but a prayer that draws us into the beauty of Jesus' unconditional love for us all and reminds us how we are to act in our relationships with others.



Part Two: *The Priesthood*

The second part of the lesson that Jesus gives us, still connected with the washing of feet, is his love through the Priesthood. St Peter, when he finally succumbs to letting the Lord wash his feet says: '*...not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!*' (*In 13:9*) St Peter as usual has missed the point. The washing of the feet is not about being physically clean it is about being clean in our hearts, that intimate place where God dwells within us. Jesus washes and cleanses us through the gift of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confession. He has chosen certain men

to be his priests in order to administer these precious life giving graces. It is through Our Lord's priests that he cleans us his people in mercy; washes us in forgiveness and he purifies us in new life. The priesthood is that sacred vocation that allows Jesus' words and actions to become truly present for the salvation of those who desire God and want to journey towards Him. Priests come in many shapes and sizes! Varying personalities carrying both strengths and weakness', however, no saint, not even the most holiest and mystical saint, ever reached Heaven or truly knew Jesus Christ without encountering a priest and the Sacraments.



Part Three: *The Eucharist*

The final part of our master's lesson on discipleship is found in the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ. When a couple come before the altar to marry each other they promise to always love one another in the good times and the bad. They promise to be faithful to one another in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer. They promise to serve and support one another till death do they part. In the Eucharist, which Jesus instituted on this night in the upper room, he makes the same vow of love to us, he uses the same intimate language of marriage. He

becomes the bridegroom giving everything, even his own body, for us the church his bride.

'Now as they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat;' he said 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them. 'Drink all of you from this,' he said 'for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins...'"

(Matt 26: 26-28)

It is through the Eucharist that we are able to have the opportunity to be in such close loving union with Our Lord. He allows us to have Holy Communion to strengthen us on our journey through life, to remind us he is ever present and faithful, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer till death do we part. He gives us his very Body and Blood to show us that he loves us so much he keeps nothing from us – not even his actual real living presence in the Holy Eucharist.

Our teacher concludes his lesson on being a disciple of love with these words:

'I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'
(Jn 13:15)

In the Washing of Feet, in the Sacraments, in the Priesthood and in the Eucharist Jesus reveals that he is Love itself and shows us the path we must walk if we are to call ourselves disciples. A real love that is humble. A real love that serves others no matter whether they are friend or foe. A love that is merciful and does not judge. A love that is always faithful. The lesson of Jesus our teacher is concluded. What have you learnt from it?

God Bless you and pray for me and all my brother priests on this feast of the Sacred Priesthood.

Keep praying for the containment and eradication of this awful virus so that we can all be reunited at the Altar of the Lord and receive his Sacraments again to help us in our lives of faith.

Fr. O'Brien