

## Maundy Thursday Homily – 2020 – Plymouth Cathedral

Service, Priesthood and Eucharist; these are the three gifts that are at the centre of tonight's celebration. Of course, we cannot have the washing of the feet in our ceremony tonight, because we do not have a congregation present in which it can take place. There is a kind of poignant sadness in that. And yet we know, that the Lord, says that this service which he showed to his disciples, we are to mirror in our lives.

And in these past weeks we've been given again and again, examples of loving service to those in need. How rightly people have gathered on Thursday evenings to clap for Carers. We miss the washing of the feet in our ceremony tonight, but we laud and applaud, that loving service, which is shown in our society, and in so many places across the globe, at this time.

“I have given you an example for you to copy what I have done”, the Lord says in tonight's Gospel, and we have seen many copies of the Master's Service in these days. Each of these individuals working in the caring professions, has been to us an example of the Suffering servant of the Lord, whom we remember on this night knelt before his followers and showed His loving service of them.

The Gift of Priesthood. It's very poignant that priests are having to celebrate tonight's liturgy on their own, without their congregations. I know that many of them feel this very deeply, especially tonight, on the day we recall the Lord instituting the Eucharist and establishing the gift of the Ordained Priesthood in our Church. It is indeed a poignant moment as we recall individual Priests, celebrating this Mass of the Lord's Supper on their own, in their parish Church.

So please, pray for your Priests and know that they are praying for you. They do so, not just this night, but in all the Masses which are celebrated at this time. The Mass is still the gift of the Lord to us, and it comes to us, through the hands of the priests who serve us. Each priest, across our country will, today, have renewed their Priestly promise. They will

have prayed quietly before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and out loud to Him, declared the renewal of their priestly commitment.

After Mass tonight, there will be no watching at the altar of repose in our churches, because of course, there is no congregation that can come and watch. But we are invited, at National level, to participate in that watching which is taking place at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. Maybe later this evening, at some point, you would go online and click on the website of St Chad's Cathedral in the Archdiocese of Birmingham and together across our country, through the means of modern media, we will each watch with the Lord.

Either at that moment, or at another quiet moment this night, I ask you to please pray for your Parish Priest and the Priests who work in your parish. Ask the Lord to renew them and strengthen them in their priestly ministry. Give thanks to God for their presence and service in our parishes.

And the third gift of course tonight is this wonderful gift of the Holy Eucharist. Later, in the Eucharistic prayer, we will hear these words "On the day before he was to suffer for our salvation and the salvation of all, **that is today**" This line introduces the words of the Lord, that he first gave us on this Holy Thursday night when he said "Take.....this is my body....Take..... this is my blood". Today, the Lord is still giving us this gift. Today the Lord is still offering himself to the Father, in the mystery of the Eucharist. Today the Lord is still showering us with his gifts.

I know that there is much pain in our hearts at the Eucharistic fast that we are having to endure in these weeks. We feel it especially tonight, on the night when the Lord instituted the Eucharist and we commemorate that offering of his to the Father. Yet, in participating in this Mass, through the means of modern communication, and in the other Masses, that we have participated in, who knows what fruits the Lord will bestow upon you and those who you love?

There is a famous dictum that God's grace is not limited to his sacraments. It's an important truth for us to remember, that even in these days when we physically cannot receive Holy Communion, nevertheless, through participating in this way, through our desire for a spiritual communion, through our naming of that, at the time of Holy Communion, the Lord can still enter our hearts and abide there. He can give us His grace.

Over the last 2,000+ years, Catholics have gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. We could not be there on Calvary over two thousand years ago. But through the Mass, through our participation in the Mass, in whatever way we are able to do that, the fruits of the sacrifice of Calvary are showered upon us. This is our Catholic Faith. This is what we commemorate tonight in this most poignant of celebrations, in which however far apart we are, however impossible it is for us physically to come together, nevertheless, we are one in our Catholic Faith. And tonight, we give thanks to the Lord for giving us that example and gift of service, for giving us the gift of the Priesthood, and for giving us especially the gift of the Holy Eucharist.

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