

The Institution of the Holy Eucharist

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper - Jn 13:1-15

Ave Maria Catholic Church, April 14, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

Today, we remember the sacred evening when Jesus instituted Holy Eucharist during the Last Supper. The synoptic Gospels relate that Jesus, at the Last Supper, took bread and wine and told his disciples to eat and drink, for these were his body and blood, given for the forgiveness of sins. And Jesus also said do this in remembrance of me. These words are the foundation for our faith in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist and the institution of the Catholic Priesthood by which Jesus' command will be carried out to the end of time.

It was during a Passover that Our Lord first announced the Eucharist. Then, in another Passover, He instituted it.

The first announcement came after the multiplication of bread, when Jesus said: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world,"* (John 6: 51). And he added: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink,"* (John 6: 53).

At that time, Jesus lost the masses; he lost the crowds because he was not offering bread and outward spectacles as earthly kings had done. He also lost disciples who walked away, returning to their former way of life complaining: *"This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"* (John 6:60).

Jesus asked the twelve: *"Do you also want to leave? Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God,'"* (John 6:68-69).

The next announcement was given on the evening of the institution of the Eucharist which is also in the context of the celebration of the Passover. And now, what Jesus had promised during that discourse on the bread of life is fulfilled.

The evangelist Luke says that *"Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you,'"* (Lk. 22: 19-20).

At that very moment, two great treasures of our faith were instituted: one, the Holy Eucharist, where Jesus is really, truly, and substantially present; the other, the Catholic Priesthood.

Let us be grateful for these gifts! Let us be grateful for the presence of Jesus on our altars in the Holy Eucharist! How can we show our gratitude? I will propose this: our gratitude must be seen in the way we receive the Eucharist. For the reception of the Eucharist, there is a particular necessity for purity, which Jesus explicitly emphasized at the Last Supper.

When Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet, it was profoundly clear that he wanted to give them a lesson in humble service because, with that gesture, he responded in living action to the dispute among them as to who was the greatest. (See Luke 22:24). But while he enlightened them about the way of humility, inviting them to live a life of service by following his example, he further intended to show them something else. With the gesture of the washing of the feet, Jesus reveals the need for a pure heart to partake in the Eucharistic banquet.

The apostles learned that lesson. At a later time, Saint Paul will teach the Christian community to prepare their hearts for the reception of the Eucharist, as he says to the Corinthians and all of us: "*Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord,*" (1 Cor 11:27-29).

Of course, in a certain sense, no one is worthy to receive the Body of Christ. However, in our unworthiness, we must make a sincere effort to examine our consciences, confess our sins, and receive pardon and peace for our souls.

Is it not consoling to know that with the institution of the Catholic Priesthood, Jesus gave us the treasure of the Eucharist and the treasure of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? In this way, Jesus washes our feet; He washes our souls, and after he brings purity to our hearts, we sit at the Eucharist table and receive his Sacred Body and Precious Blood.

Let us be grateful for this tremendous gift! The Eucharist is indeed a foretaste of heaven! The Eucharist is Jesus with us; the Eucharist is God with us but under the Sacramental veil. The Eucharist is not heaven yet. Here on earth, we have only a foretaste of heaven. We don't see Jesus as we wish. He is hidden under the mysterious Eucharistic veil. We do not possess Jesus as we desire; here on earth, we still walk by faith. For this reason, before the Blessed Sacrament, we groan for the final union with Christ; we groan for a final and complete union with Him.

Thomas Aquinas captures these desires in his hymn, the "*Adoro te Devote* - I devoutly adore you."

I devoutly adore you, hidden deity,
Who are truly hidden beneath these appearances.
My whole heart submits to You,
because in contemplating You, it is fully deficient.

Sight, touch, taste all fail in their judgment of you,
But hearing suffices firmly to believe.
I believe all that the Son of God has spoken;
There is nothing truer than this word of Truth.

Jesus, whom now I see hidden,
I ask You to fulfill what I so desire:
That the sight of Your Face being unveiled
I may have the happiness of seeing Your glory. Amen.