

Holy Thursday **April 14, 2022**

Tonight we gather to remember and celebrate the Last Supper. It is called "The Last Supper" because it was the last time Jesus would share a meal with His apostles before His death and resurrection. But, we could also call it "The First Supper" because it was the first time that Jesus gave His own Body and Blood to be our food. On that first Holy Thursday night over two thousand years ago, Jesus left us the Eucharist and the Priesthood to ensure that His saving presence would continue in the world down through the ages.

There were many commandments that Jesus left us to follow. For instance, He commanded us to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He told us that we should pray for our enemies. He taught us to be humble and to serve the poor. Throughout the centuries, Christians have struggled to keep these commandments of Christ. Often, we have failed at all of them. But, there is one commandment of Christ that Christians have been very faithful at obeying. It is the commandment that Jesus left us on that first Holy Thursday night. "Do this in memory of me." Down through the ages, Christians have faithfully gathered every Sunday - and even every day - to gather at Mass in memory of Jesus and to receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

The Second Vatican Council taught us that the Holy Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life". This is so important for us to remember. We cannot stress it enough. It means that everything we do as Christians flows from Holy Communion and leads back to it. So it is important for us to ask ourselves, does everything we do as a parish or cluster flow from and lead back to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? Does everything we do as a family, find its source in the Mass and draw us back

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to the Mass? Does everything we do as individuals draw its strength from the altar and lead us back to the altar? For those areas of our lives where we can say "yes", we thank God. For those areas where we cannot say "yes", we ask for God's mercy and the strength to change.

Why do we call the Eucharist the "source of the Christian life"? Because it is in the Blessed Sacrament that we meet Jesus. In Holy Communion, we encounter the Risen Lord still active and present among us. Just as Jesus changed the lives of so many people who encountered Him during His earthly life, so He continues to transform us who encounter Him in Holy Communion. He heals us, just as He healed so many people during His earthly life. He opens our eyes to the needs of the people around us. He opens our ears so that we can hear His word and take it to heart. In the Eucharist we come face-to-face with the God of love. We discover that we are loved unconditionally, just as we are. And having encountered that love, we are able to share it with others. The Christian life consists simply in following Jesus' command to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are able to do this because we encounter the love of God in the Eucharist. It is for this reason that it is "the source of the Christian life."

Holy Communion is also called the "summit of the Christian life", because the ultimate goal of our lives is to share an eternity of love with God in Heaven. We were created with hearts large enough to love God. In the Eucharist we receive our heart's desire. We receive God Himself. We are fed with the only food that can satisfy us. The Eucharist is the summit of the Christian life because there is nothing higher for us to attain than the heights of intimate communion with God. We reach that height - or better yet, God carries us to that height-whenver we receive Holy Communion.

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What can we do to ensure that the Eucharist which Jesus left us on that first Holy Thursday becomes the source and summit of our lives?

The first answer is to go to Mass at least every Sunday. Jesus cannot be the source of our lives if we are not receiving Him regularly. If you are already going to Mass every Sunday, consider also going during the week, or every day. That regular encounter with the Risen Lord will help train our hearts in the way of love.

Another way we can increase our love for Jesus in the Eucharist and draw our life from Him is through Eucharistic adoration. Spending time silently before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, adoring Him, and pouring our hearts out to Him will give us greater intimacy with Jesus. Just as our friendships grow when we spend time together, so our love of Jesus grows when we spend time in His presence.

Finally, we can make sure the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives by serving others. Jesus left us an example on that first Holy Thursday by washing the feet of His disciples. We must serve one another, then, with humble and loving hearts. During these next few days, ask God how He wants you to serve Him through others. It could be something very simple, but, if we do it with love, it will have a powerful effect. Whatever it is we may be called to, we must find the love to do it through our contact with Jesus in the Eucharist. Then we must bring whatever it is we have done back to Mass to be united with the offering of bread and wine, so that Jesus can transform it.

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There is a moment during the ordination ceremony for priests when the bishop takes the paten and the chalice which hold the bread and wine to be consecrated at Mass and places them in the hands of the man who has just been ordained. The bishop then says, "Receive from the Holy People of God the gifts to be offered to God. Know what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross." These words not only are appropriate for priests but for all of us who have been baptized. We are called to imitate what we celebrate in the Eucharist by conforming our lives to the cross of Christ. Just as Jesus gives Himself to us in Holy Communion we are called to give our lives back to Him by serving others. Many times it will involve sacrifice, struggle, and pain. But we can find the strength to endure it all by receiving the love of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament which we celebrate in memory of Him who loved us even to the point of death.