

“I have earnestly desired to share this Passover with you before I suffer,” Saint Luke recounts Jesus said at the beginning of the Last Supper. Jesus earnestly desired to share this Passover with His disciples. This evening, how earnestly we find ourselves desiring to share this night with our Lord Jesus. As we begin the Triduum, the 3 days, the heart of the Great Week, the Cross of Christ unites our celebrations. Our entrance hymn, Lift High the Cross, reminded us of the Entrance Antiphon for this Mass, “We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom is our salvation, life, and resurrection, through Whom we are saved and delivered.” It is through the mystery of the Cross that tonight we consider the three great mysteries our Lord gave us on Holy Thursday: the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the institution of the Priesthood, and the commandment of fraternal charity. In these present times when we find our lives overshadowed by the cross, we are called to reflect and enter more deeply into the mystery.

Jesus earnestly desired to share *this* Passover with His apostles on this night to impart to them important lessons. He desired to share this Passover to demonstrate His love for us. He desired to share this Passover to institute the worship in spirit and truth which He spoke of to the Samaritan Woman at the Well: the worship of the new and eternal covenant, the New Passover, found uniquely in the Catholic Mass.

On this night we commemorate the Last Supper it is interesting that the Church appoints the Gospel of the washing of the feet, the *Mandatum*. As the Gospel of Saint John tells us of this night, “Jesus loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end.” He showed us the way to love and serve each other. In this time, we think of all those who offer their lives in service of others, sometimes at great personal risk.

The washing of the feet was a gesture of Jesus’ love and humility, and to prepare us for His great act of humble charity of dying on the Cross for our sins. With great joy at the beginning of the Easter Vigil, we will acclaim God the Father, “O wonder of your humble care for us! O love, O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son.” In the Blood of Christ poured out on the Cross and poured out to us in the sacrament of the altar we are washed clean of our sins

Washing and cleanliness in both body and spirit are important for the worship of God. Let’s take notice that Jesus washes the *feet* of His apostles. Let’s consider our feet for a moment—they are our connection with the earth. In the second Preface of Lent for the Eucharistic Prayer, we prayed that “freed from disordered affections” that we may “deal with the

things of this passing world as to hold rather to the things that eternally endure.” The washing of feet directs our attention to the need to be heavenly-minded rather than earthly minded, to live in the spirit of radical fidelity to God, with concern for the salvation of souls.

So let’s consider the things of Heaven in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist through the gift of music- the hymn *Ave verum corpus*, believed to have been composed by Pope Innocent the 6th, which we will hear today and tomorrow in the beautiful settings by Mozart and Byrd. “Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary, having truly suffered, sacrificed on the cross for mankind, from whose pierced side water and blood flowed: Be for us a foretaste of Heaven in the trial of death!” The Body of Christ wounded for our offenses on the Cross, and made present to us on the altar, is a link for us between Heaven and earth. Here at this altar and the altars of Catholic Churches throughout the world, Heaven and earth are joined, every time the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. On our baldachino, we see the angels and saints depicted, reminding us how we profess in the Creed God is Creator of all things “visible and invisible.” It’s not just us here at Mass; they are here praying with us and for us.

Bread and wine are transformed so that we may be transformed, as Saint Augustine says, “we become what we receive.” While sadly we cannot receive our Lord sacramentally now, we can still receive Him spiritually, and form that act of the will and heart to be united with our Lord, and ask he may give us a heart like his, filled with abundant charity and love.

How could we not adore and venerate this great Sacrament of Charity? Let’s consider some of the signs used in the Mass to show the excellence of this great gift and mystery: the presence of candles on or near the altar, candles made from burning wax that give of themselves to create light, just as Jesus gave of himself totally on the cross; the wearing of liturgical vestments that show that what we do at Mass is not like our ordinary daily activities; it is not commonplace, but extraordinary and supernatural; the usage of incense as a sign of honor and our prayers rising up to God; the ringing of bells at the time of consecration to direct us to the great miracle happening in our midst; and the genuflection we make by kneeling down on our right knee by the priest at the time of the consecration and any time we visit a Catholic Church.

I know those watching now on CFN earnestly desire to be at Mass this evening. There is great hunger now for the Eucharist. Having to stay at home inspires us to radical fidelity to the Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. This situation inspires us to recover a sense of the centrality of the Sunday Mass in our week as its summit and source. Once we can return to

Mass, how would we ever miss Mass because we have something else to do? We will miss other things because we have to be at Mass, and not out of obligation, but out of love!

We are then moved to consider the third mystery of Holy Thursday: the Institution of the Holy Priesthood. From the time I was 12 years old when I altar served and attended my first Holy Thursday Mass, I have been filled with wonder at this evening. I always think of the great love for the Mass and the Holy Eucharist I saw modeled by priests I knew growing up, who I now may call my brothers. I think of the reverence and devotion with which they offered the Mass that inspired me to think that one day I could be called to follow in their footsteps.

On this holy night, we give thanks to God and we pray for our priests as we think of the cross they carry in not being able to offer the Holy Mass publicly and minister in the more conventional ways. We give thanks to God and we pray for the priests who ministered to us in special ways, especially in the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, but even coming to offer the Anointing of the Sick and the Apostolic Pardon to our dying family and friends. We think especially of the courageous priests in our own time who minister to those who suffer or are dying from the coronavirus.

I stand here in the presence of my 8 brother priests from the cathedral with nearly 273 years of ordination. We have never experienced a Holy Week like this and pray we never will again, yet we do it vividly remembering the day of our ordination when the Bishop handed us the chalice and paten with the bread and wine and said to us, “receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God, understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.” It is not just in the sacrifices we make in these unfortunate times, but in all the sacrifices made in fatherly love and the spirit of humble service, both known and unknown.

As we offer this Mass tonight, at the moment of the consecration, we will find ourselves with Saint John the Apostle and our Blessed Mother at the foot of the Cross and united with every Mass being offered, that has ever been offered, and that ever will be offered. We think of the great priest-saints throughout the history of our Church, not just holy men, but true heroes. We mystically join them at the altar tonight, along with all the faithful who have ever attended Mass before.

I invite every young man watching tonight on CFN to consider whether God is calling him to the Catholic priesthood. There are young men with generous hearts and love for Christ.

Who will stand up next to serve, bringing the Good News of Jesus and the sacraments to the people for the salvation of souls? Priesthood is supernatural. It's not something we can do on our own, without help. God gives grace in the sacrament of ordination, not only the power to celebrate the sacraments, so that we can live out this noble vocation faithfully. On this special night, let's pray for a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood, especially for gift and grace of having 30 seminarians for our Diocese of Rockville Centre.

"I have earnestly desired to share this Passover with you before I suffer." Lord, we now come to You, we earnestly desire to share this Passover with you. Help us to walk with You on the way of the Cross and conform ourselves more fully to Your Cross. We pray, O Lord, that as we offer this Mass, bringing to it all the concerns and needs of the world, that You may show Your closeness to us, that You may pour out the fountain of grace upon Your Church, that You will fill us with the spirit of love of You and of our neighbor. May we one day soon gather at Your altar to give You thanks and partake in this most excellent sacrament of charity and love.

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever!

Our Lady, Mother of the Eucharist, pray for us!

Saint Joseph, pray for us!

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, pray for us!