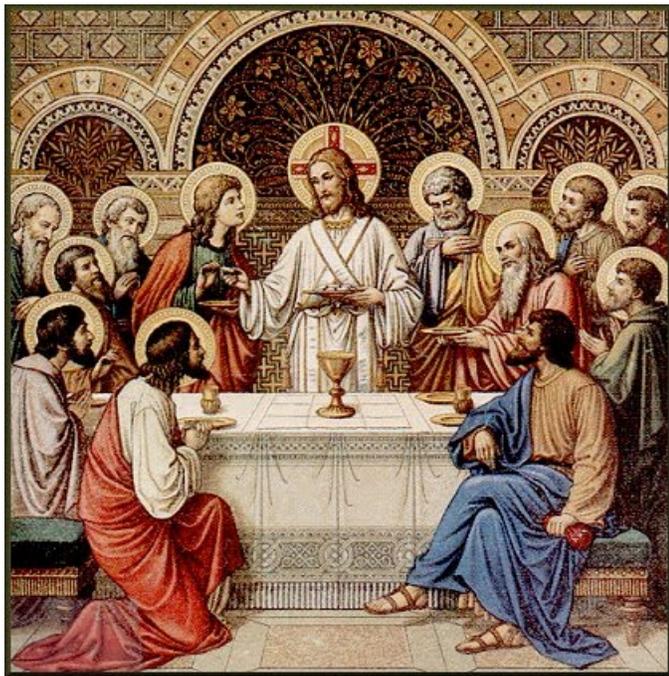


Maundy Thursday

Feria Quinta
in Coena Domini



A Meditation

The Institution Of The Eucharist

At the Mystical Supper in the Upper Room Jesus gave a radically new meaning to the food and drink of the sacred meal. He identified Himself with the bread and wine: *"Take, eat; this is my Body. Drink of it all of you; for this is my Blood of the New Covenant"* (Mt 26:26-28).

We have learned to equate food with life because it sustains our earthly existence. In the Eucharist the distinctively unique human food - bread and wine - becomes our gift of life. Consecrated and sanctified, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This change is not physical but mystical and sacramental. While the qualities of the bread and wine remain, we partake of the true Body and Blood of Christ. In the eucharistic meal God enters into such a communion of life that He feeds humanity with His own being, while still remaining distinct. In the words of St. Maximus the Confessor, Christ, *"transmits to us divine life, making Himself eatable."* The Author of life shatters

the limitations of our createdness. Christ acts so that "we might become sharers of divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

The Eucharist is at the center of the Church's life. It is her most profound prayer and principal activity. It is at one and the same time both the source and the summit of her life. In the Eucharist the Church manifests her true nature and is continuously changed from a human community into the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the People of God. The Eucharist is the pre-eminent sacrament. It completes all the others and recapitulates the entire economy of salvation. Our new life in Christ is constantly renewed and increased by the Eucharist. The Eucharist imparts life and the life it gives is the life of God.

In the Eucharist the Church remembers and enacts sacramentally the redemptive event of the Cross and participates in its saving grace. This does not suggest that the Eucharist attempts to reclaim a past event. The Eucharist does not repeat what cannot be repeated. Christ is not slain anew and repeatedly. Rather the eucharistic food is changed concretely and really into the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God, *"Who gave Himself up for the life of the world."* Christ, God and Man, continually offers Himself to the faithful through the consecrated Gifts, i.e., His very own risen and deified Body, which for our sake died once and now lives (Heb 10:2; Apoc 1:18). Hence, the faithful come to Church week by week not only to worship God and to hear His word. They come, first of all, to experience over and over the mystery of salvation and to be united intimately to the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Eucharist we receive and partake of the resurrected Christ. We share in His sacrificed, risen and deified Body, for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal. In the Eucharist Christ pours into us - as a permanent and constant gift - the Holy Spirit, *"Who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God - and if children - then heirs with Christ"* (Rom 8:16-17).

The Washing of the Feet

The events initiated by Jesus at the Mystical Supper were profoundly significant. By teaching and giving the disciples His final instructions and praying for them as well, He revealed again His divine Filiation and authority. By establishing the Eucharist, He enshrines to perfection God's most intimate purposes for our salvation, offering Himself as Communion and life. By washing the feet of His disciples, He summarized the meaning of His ministry, manifested His perfect love and revealed His profound humility.

The act of the washing of the feet (Jn 13:2-17) is closely related to the sacrifice of the Cross. Both reveal aspects of Christ's abasement. While the Cross

constitutes the ultimate manifestation of Christ's perfect obedience to His Father (Phil 2:5-8), the washing of the feet signifies His intense love and the giving of Himself to each person according to that person's ability to receive Him (Jn 13:6-9).

Prayer in the Garden

The Synoptic Gospels have preserved for us another significant episode in the series of events leading to the Passion, namely, the agony and prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46; Mc 14:32-42; Lc 22:39-46).

Although Jesus was Son of God, He was destined as man to accept fully the human condition, to experience suffering and to learn obedience. Divesting Himself of divine prerogatives, the Son of God assumed the role of a servant. He lived a truly human existence. Though He was Himself sinless, He allied Himself with the whole human race, identified with the human predicament, and experienced the same tests (Phil 2:6-11; Heb 2:9-18).

The moving events in the Garden of Gethsemane dramatically and poignantly disclosed the human nature of Christ. The sacrifice He was to endure for the salvation of the world was imminent. Death, with all its brutal force and fury, stared directly at Him. Its terrible burden and fear – the calamitous results of original sin – caused Him intense sorrow and pain (Heb 5:7). Instinctively, as man He sought to escape it. He found Himself in a moment of decision. In His agony He prayed to His Father, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt"* (Mc 14:36).

His prayer revealed the depths of His agony and sorrow. It revealed as well His incomparable spiritual strength and immovable desire and decision to bring about the will of the Father. Jesus offered His unconditional love and trust to the Father. He reached the extreme limits of self-denial – *"not what I will"* – in order to accomplish His Father's will.

His acceptance of death was not some kind of stoic passivity and resignation but an act of absolute love and obedience. In that moment of decision, when He declared His acceptance of death to be in agreement with the Father's will, He broke the power of the fear of death with all its attending uncertainties, anxieties and limitations. He learned obedience and fulfilled the divine plan (Heb 5:8-9).

The Betrayal

Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss, the sign of friendship and love. The betrayal and crucifixion of Christ carried original sin to its extreme limits. In these two acts the rebellion against God reached its maximum

capacity. The seduction of man in paradise culminated in the death of God in the flesh. To be victorious evil must quench the light and discredit the good. In the end, however, it shows itself to be a lie, an absurdity and sheer madness. The death and resurrection of Christ rendered evil powerless.

On Maundy Thursday light and darkness, joy and sorrow are so strangely mixed. At the Upper Room and in Gethsemane the light of the kingdom and the darkness of hell come through simultaneously. The way of life and the way of death converge. We meet them both in our journey through life.

In the midst of the snares and temptations that abound in the world around and in us we must be eager to live in communion with everything that is good, noble, natural, and sinless, forming ourselves by God's grace in the likeness of Christ.



History and customs

The feast of Maundy (or Holy) Thursday solemnly commemorates the institution of the Eucharist and is the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week. In Rome various accessory ceremonies were early added to this commemoration, namely the consecration of the holy oils and the reconciliation of penitents, ceremonies obviously practical in character and readily explained by the proximity of the Christian Easter and the necessity of preparing for it. Holy Thursday could not but be a day of liturgical reunion since, in the cycle of movable feasts, it brings around the anniversary of the institution of the Liturgy. On that day, whilst the preparation of candidates was being completed, the Church celebrated the *Missa chrisimalis* and, moreover, proceeded to the reconciliation of penitents. In Rome everything was carried on in daylight, whereas in Africa on Holy Thursday the Eucharist was celebrated after the evening meal, in view of more exact conformity with the circumstances of the Last Supper. Canon 24 of the Council of Carthage dispenses the faithful from fast before communion on Holy Thursday, because, on that day, it was customary take a bath, and the bath and fast were considered

incompatible. St. Augustine, too, speaks of this custom (Ep. cxviii ad Januarium, n. 7); he even says that as certain persons did not fast on that day, the oblation was made twice, morning and evening, and in this way those who did not observe the fast could partake of the Eucharist after the morning meal, whilst those who fasted awaited the evening repast.

Holy Thursday was taken up with a succession of ceremonies of a joyful character. the baptism of neophytes, the reconciliation of penitents, the consecration of the holy oils, the washing of the feet, and commemoration of the Blessed Eucharist, and because of all these ceremonies, the day received different names, all of which allude to one or another of solemnities.

Redditio symboli was so called because, before being admitted to baptism, the catechumens had to recite the creed from memory, either in the presence of the bishop or his representative.

Pedilavium (washing of the feet), traces of which are found in the most ancient rites, occurred in many churches on Holy Thursday, the *capitilavium* (washing of the head) having taken place on Palm Sunday (St. Augustine, "Ep. cxviii, cxix", e. 18).

Exomologesis, and reconciliation of penitents: letter of Pope Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio, testifies that in Rome it was customary "quinta feria Pascha" to absolve penitents from their mortal and venial sins, except in cases of serious illness which kept them away from church (St. Ambrose, "Ep. xxxiii ad Marcellinam"). The penitents heard the *Missa pro reconciliatione paenitentium*, and absolution was given them before the offertory. The "Sacramentary" of Pope Gelasius contains an *Ordo agentibus publicam poenitentiam*.

Olei exorcizati confectio. In the fifth century the custom was established of consecrating on Holy Thursday all the chrism necessary for the anointing of the newly baptized. The "Comes Hieronymi", the Gregorian and Gelasian sacramentaries and the "Missa ambrosiana" of Pamelius, all agree upon the confection of the chrism on that day, as does also the "Ordo romanus I".

Anniversarium Eucharistiae. The nocturnal celebration and the double oblation early became the object of increasing disfavour, until in 692 the Council of Trullo promulgated a formal prohibition. The Eucharistic celebration then took place in the morning, and the bishop reserved a part of the sacred species for the communion of the morrow, *Missa praesanctificatorum*.

Other observances. On Holy Thursday the ringing of bells ceases, the altar is stripped after vespers, and the night office is celebrated under the name of *Tenebrae*.



Becoming the servant of all

The present day is that of the Mystical Supper, which the Lord celebrated before His suffering and at which He instituted the Mystery of the Communion of His Body and Blood. We commune of Christ's Holy Mysteries at Mass: this Mystery is the center of our Christian life, the center of our fellowship with Jesus Christ. This is paramount for someone who believes in God and is a member of Christ's Church. We indeed aspire towards this Mystery and it is indeed very important for us to be with Christ and to commune of His Body and Life-Giving Blood.

Today's Liturgy is essentially no different than any other Divine Liturgy, because the same Mystery takes place and the same words are spoken during every Divine Liturgy. The same Body and Blood are offered to the faithful.

Nonetheless, the present day is a special one for the Church, because today the meaning of our journey to Christ, the meaning of our encounter with Him, the meaning of our fellowship with Him is experienced more than ever.

Today's Gospel reading opens up this Mystery of the Church to us, this Mystery of our life and of the meaning of our faith in general. When Christ comes to His disciples, He removes His outer clothing, takes a basin with water and, approaching each disciple, begins to wash his feet. He washes the feet of each, including the betrayer, who will be unfaithful to Him. He washes their feet with love, meekness, and humility. In reply to the bewilderment of the disciples about why He is doing this, and to Peter's words – *dost Thou wash my feet?* (John 13:6) – Christ says: I am doing this so that you, too, would do this. This is the meaning of our encounter. This is the meaning of our fellowship.

Let us recall the Gospel and give thought to what the Lord commands us to do. Let us recall and be amazed, because in the Gospel the Lord does not in fact command us to do much of anything. For example, nowhere does He command His disciples to fast. The Pharisees ask why His disciples do not fast, to which He replies: *they cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with them*. He does not give any particular prayer rule. They themselves approached Him first to ask: *Lord, teach us how to pray*. He gave them a very short prayer and nothing more.

There was just one thing that He repeated constantly – many, many times to His disciples – in the Gospel: *whoever wants to be the chief among you, whoever wants to be the first, let him be the servant of all*. The Lord repeats these words to us persistently: *the first shall be last, and the last shall be first*.

When He was completing His earthly journey, He washed the feet of His disciples in order to get across to us the most important thing in the Gospel. The Lord thereby showed us once again why He had come to earth and what we should do to please God. Was it to fast, to fulfill certain prayer rules, to perform acts of charity, or to do something else that might add something external to us? No, not at all. He never gave any special instructions regarding philanthropy, fasts, or prayers. These had already been given. They are naturally human. Without this someone is just not human, if he ignores beggars or the grieving and does not help them. This is not what makes him a new and different person. This is not what will lead him into the Heavenly Kingdom.

The Lord constantly repeated just one thing: *be the servant of all*. Later He also said: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another*. Love one another with the same love with which I love you, with the same love with which My Heavenly Father loves Me. Not with any love beside this: not with human, fleshly love, but with Divine, Ineffable, and Unutterable love.

This Divine love is manifest in the Lord humbling Himself before people to the point of suffering on the Cross. To the point that, for our sake, He comes to earth, takes on human nature in all its fullness, with all its sinful repercussions and human infirmities, and enters the depths of every person's suffering. He does not reject any sinner, but comes to them first. He says: I came to earth for their sake, for the sake of publicans, sinners, and harlots. He eats with them and drinks with them. He spends more time with them than with anyone else. This is something we also need to picture. It is unpleasant for us to be around dishonorable and unclean people; we want to dissociate ourselves from them. This is something naturally human, a naturally human fear of

touching something infected. But Christ was with them above all, in order to save man. And He began to serve them. He began to pour Himself out completely for their sake – for their sake, and for ours, because we are no different from them.

The Lord offers us this image. This is not just an example, as if the Lord, just for the sake of setting an example, removed His garments and showed us what to do, as we sometimes teach children using an example we ourselves would never follow. The Lord washes His disciples' feet because He always does this, because this is something He does constantly. This is the way in which He treats us.

Sometimes we think that just by coming to church we are accomplishing some remarkable feat. How wonderful we are! How much are we doing for God by coming to church, going to confession! But we do not understand that by coming to church we are entering that same upper room where the Lord gathered His disciples and washed their feet. We do not think about the fact that when we come to church He begins to do just this for us, because when we go to confession, He begins to serve us and to wash not only our feet, but our hands and head as well, because we are defiled. He washes us all in confession. We come to God in order to ask His help, but He immediately begins to serve us and to fulfill even our petty desires and our empty, mundane, human demands that are of no spiritual benefit to us.

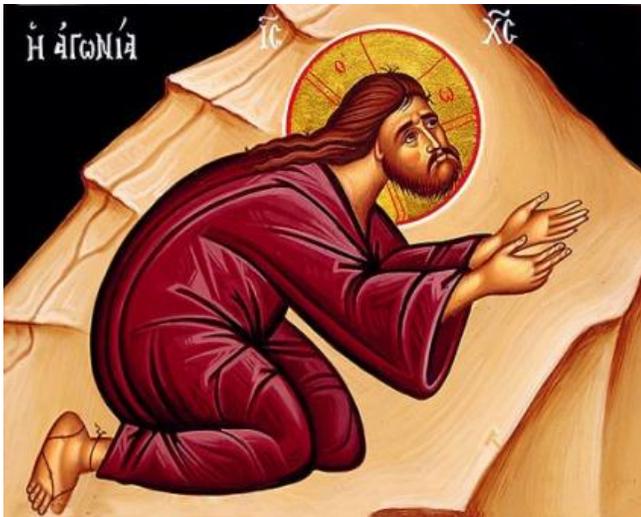
This is what is opened up to us today. Today we do not simply approach Christ and accept His sacrifice for us. Today we approach Christ to offer our own sacrifice, so that He would accept it, so that we would be at least a little bit worthy, so that the Lord would accept our sacrifice. This is the sacrifice of love and humility, and nothing else. Because nothing else leads us into the Heavenly Kingdom except for this desire to see another person in the light of His love: to forget his shortcomings, his distortedness, his sinful twistedness, and to see in him Christ Himself, Who came into the world and made Himself your neighbor, as the Gospel teaches us.

Without this no Christianity will take place. Without this there is no Church of God, because the Church of God is the continual service of love for God and one another. And there can be no other Christian Church without this happening.

If this love is not in us, then we can observe the fasts, read the Gospel, pray a great deal, and give everything we own to the poor. The Apostle Paul writes that even if I give my body to be burned, but do not have this love in me, that it has no value or meaning [cf. 1 Corinthians 13:3]. Therefore it is natural that the Lord would expect this love from us. Divine love is born only through humility. If we understand that this love is not in

us, that we would like to love but cannot, this means that we lack the most elementary thing: humility. In order to gain this love, we need to act as the Lord teaches us: to see your master in your neighbor.

This will be the most important foundation of our faith, of our journey to Christ. When we receive His Holy Body and Blood today, let us ask that, as we leave church, we may see the world through different eyes, the eyes through which the saints saw our world: whoever has seen his brother has seen his God. Amen.



No one could take His life

Although the Gospel of St. John does not record the Lord's Agony in the Garden, it does include several texts that put us in mind of that scene inasmuch as they reflect the sentiments and resolution expressed by Jesus during the Synoptics' accounts of the Agony.

For example, our Lord's determination to obey the Father's will, a resolve so essential to his prayer in the garden, is expressed earlier in John in what he says to the disciples at the Samaritan well:

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work" (4:34).

In the next chapter of John, Jesus speaks again of this intended obedience:

"I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me" (5:30).

Exactly the same resolution on Jesus' part appears in the chapter after that:

"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (6:38).

Two chapters later Jesus says of his Father, *"I always do those things that please Him" (8:29).*

In John's Last Supper discourse, Jesus explains that this obedience to the Father is inspired by love:

"I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do" (14:31).

In John's Gospel, Jesus' obedience to the Father is directed to glorifying the Father:

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him" (7:18).

This theme of Jesus' obedience to the Father's will takes on a more explicitly active tone in John, because this evangelist goes to some length to portray Jesus as disposing of his own destiny. That is to say, John describes Jesus, not as passively submitting to the Father's will, but as resolutely and actively seeking it. In the parable of the good shepherd, Jesus announces,

"I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from my Father (10:17-18)."

This more active quality of the Lord's obedience is likewise indicated in the manner of Jesus' arrest in the garden. When his would-be captors came to seize him, they were unable until he gave them leave to do so. Thus, when Jesus identified himself to them, John records,

"they drew back and fell to the ground" (18:6).

Truly, no one could take his life. It remained his, to be freely laid down in obedience to the Father's command.

In a sort of culminating scene, where the language is very reminiscent of the agony in the garden, John again writes of Jesus' set purpose to glorify God by obedience. In the chapter immediately before the Last Supper, the Lord speaks of his coming death in this way:

"Amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (12:24).

Next he describes that death as being "lifted up," a reference to his crucifixion.

("This he said, signifying by what death He would die"—12:33.)

Between these descriptions of his approaching death, Jesus speaks of the distress it causes him.

“Now my soul is troubled” (12:27),

says he, in a sentence that reminds us of the Agony accounts in the Synoptics (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:33; Luke 22:44). Even in this troubled state, however, Jesus does not pray that the hour of his passion will pass Him by:

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:27-28).

This reference to Jesus’ troubled soul is as close as John comes to an equivalent of the Synoptics’ agony in the garden. Even as he faces death by crucifixion, the Jesus in John’s Gospel remains ascendant in the circumstances of that death. He will not pray to be spared the hour of his passion. With complete command of his destiny, he lays down his life out of love for the Father. When the hour of the Cross arrives, Jesus and His Father speak to One Another only of glory:

“‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again” (12:28).

And finally, there is the prayer that begins,

“Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You” (17:1).



The Cenacle and the Garden

**A Letter from Rev. Fr. Berto
to a Young Priest
who had been one of his *Dirigés***

My son,

I want to greet you this evening, when we celebrate the feast of our Priesthood.

Oh terrible mystery of the suffering Jesus! Oh Cenacle where, His eyes raised to the Father, He acts as Priest according to the order of Melchisedech! Oh Garden in whose depths He penetrates, once He has celebrated His divine Mass, to let Himself be covered by the horrible tide of sin – as His successors in the Priesthood, descending from the altar, will find in the memory of their consecration the strength to contemplate, in the darkness of their confessionals, the horrible spectacle of human malice!

The Cenacle and the Garden – oh yes, my son – our whole Priesthood is there. All the glories are in the Cenacle, all the sufferings in the Garden. Let us not abandon our Master, let us force Him, by our love, to grant us some understanding of this double mystery. Spirit of the Eucharistic Institution, spirit of the Agony, which together are the very spirit of the Priesthood of Jesus, fill us, penetrate us...

Pray, my son, pray for priests, pray for those who will be priests. Pray that our hearts become wide open, to the measure of the Heart of Jesus. Pray that our hearts become like the Heart of Jesus, instruments and organs of the divine Love that should inflame the world. Oh my God, oh our God, love the world with our hearts, use our hearts to love your children.

I leave you, my son, my beloved son, these thoughts and aspirations. Recommend me to the Most Holy Virgin.

In Christo Jesu, Rege nostro dilectissimo, cui honor, gloria et imperium sempiternum.

VICTOR-ALAIN BERTO, priest

Prayer for the Spiritual Father

Save, O Lord, and have mercy on our spiritual father and forgive his sins, but also forgive him all our sins, do not condemn him because of our sinful life, increase in him spiritual gifts, and grant him wisdom, prayer and love, and for the sake of his prayers forgive our sins, increase our virtues, and send down on us abundant grace. O Lord, preserve him by day and by night, overcome his corporal and incorporeal enemies, and deliver him from visible and invisible enemies, save him from flatterers and unrighteous men. Keep also his flock from sin, grant that in repentance we may come to a quiet and peaceful life and by repentance enter paradise.

O Lord, visit and encourage him, heal him from disease and grant him many years, for the sake of us sinners. O Sweetest Jesus, sanctify our spiritual father by Thy holiness, justify him by Thy truth, protect him by Thy mercy. My Lord, Thou hast joined us on earth, do not separate us in Thy Heavenly Kingdom. And for the sake of his prayers forgive us, great sinners, and all his spiritual children.

For Thou art good and the Lover of mankind.

Amen.