

April 2, 2015 Holy Thursday Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, as our earthly pilgrimage draws to a close, we sometimes feel a special need to leave something of ourselves behind. We, in turn, wish to express our gratitude, our affection and our appreciation to others. A legal document, a will, is prepared in which the people we love or the charities we care about receive what we owned in this life, our precious possessions. Obviously, we do so because we certainly can't leave ourselves as we exit this life.

The farewell meal of Christ with the twelve apostles had a special significance for him. Undoubtedly, it was a sorrowful meal in view of his impending execution. He gathered around Him those whom he loved in order to give his last gift, a gift by which he would always be remembered. The Lord had saved his best gift to the very last. He gave himself in the form of bread and wine. It is the great sacrament of his Body and blood.

Considering this gift, let us focus on two key words, "for you". The words underscore the Eucharist as a personal gift.

"Take, eat, this is my Body which will be given up *FOR YOU*". And "This is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new covenant. It will be shed *FOR YOU* and for all so that sins may be forgiven".

These words of Jesus remind us of his self-giving and the sacrifice of his life, a life "poured out" for us. The Eucharist is the presence of Christ's sacrifice and an act of supreme love. It is surely not a common meal. Whenever we celebrate the Sacred Mystery we enter into Jesus' hour, which is his passion, death and resurrection. In addition we might do well to reflect on the meaning of the words "This is my body". In the words of a fine biblical scholar, Gerhard Lohfink, "body" means the whole person. It is as if Jesus said "I myself am this bread, with my whole history and life... my life will be broken like this bread... I give it to you that you may share it".

Our Blessed Lord wanted to establish with countless others in every generation his continuing presence in the meal fellowship that he had instituted with that small, core group of disciples in the upper room on Holy Thursday. Bear in mind that in the ancient world, eating together was a sign of special intimacy. We share an intimate communion with the Lord and each other when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. In our age of hyper-individualism, we need to be more mindful that we are a family, a community of faith. Let us remember that whenever the Eucharist is celebrated we are in God's house. We are his guests. What a privilege and honor it is to be in the presence of the One who shed His blood for us and invites us to share in his most amazing gift.

In the evening of our life, will we consider how we may be remembered once we depart this life? What will be our parting gift (or gifts)? One suggestion: may that gift be a memory of a special devotion to Christ in the sacrament he bequeathed to us on the night before he died. Our love of Christ is the greatest of all gifts that we can pass on to each succeeding generation.

Amen!