

2020 Holy Thursday

John 13:1-15, 34-35; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The homily tonight is drawn from the Gospel and Epistle readings. Especially these verses:

From the Gospel reading: “Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me,” (Jn 13:8) and

from the Epistle reading: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord... That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Cor 11:27, 30)

If a crisis is good for one thing it’s good for revealing silliness. There’s been a lot of silliness concerning the Lord’s Supper during this COVID-19 crisis. Not that there wasn’t any silliness before. Some Christians say that the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper are no longer bread and wine after they are consecrated. Some Christians say that the bread and wine cannot be the Lord’s body and blood regardless of whether they’re consecrated or not. Some Christians say that your spirit partakes of the Lord’s body and blood in some heavenly sphere, but only if you are of the elect, and by elect, they don’t necessarily mean the baptized.

Should it surprise us that some Christians believe you can have the Lord’s Supper at home with the pastor speaking the words of institution over the video or airwaves?

Paul’s warning to the Corinthians about the misuse of the Lord’s Supper should give us serious pause about changing the way our Lord instituted His own Supper!

Some actually died from messing with the Lord's Supper! This is serious business!

Our Lord gave the Church and Christians several mandates: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;" (Mt 28:19-20a) "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld;" (Jn 20:21, 23) "Do this, [that is, the Lord's Supper] in remembrance of Me;" and "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (Jn 13:34b)

Maundy in Maundy Thursday, means mandate. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper this night and mandated that we "do this." He also loved the disciples by washing their feet, and mandated that we love one another as He loved us. The mandates for Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution come after Maundy Thursday, but are just as strong of mandates as the two we see from Jesus on this Holy Thursday.

These mandates are how our Lord serves us with the forgiveness of sins and the abundant life, both now and forever after.

Peter shows us, by example, that we must allow our Lord to serve us in the way that He commands and not in any way we want. Peter is offended that Jesus, whom he confessed as the Christ and the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16), would stoop down and wash his disgusting feet. He doesn't want to have Jesus serve him, Peter wants to serve Jesus. I'm sure you've heard many Christians say they "just want to serve Jesus," and, like me, you may have even said it yourself! But Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, [that is, if I do not serve you,] you have no share with Me." (Jn 13:8b)

We must be served by Jesus as He mandated to have a share with Him.

That is, we must receive Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Lord's Supper as He mandates to have a share with Him. Another way to say it is we must receive this beautiful Word and these beautiful Sacraments as Jesus mandated to receive adoption as sons of the living God and the full inheritance that Jesus won for us as the True Son of God!

So, how did God mandate the Sacraments to be done?

I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but it's good to hear it again.

In Holy Baptism, you apply water by sprinkling or pouring or immersion and say the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And we only do it once because Paul reminds us in Ephesians that there is only one Baptism.

In Holy Absolution, the pastor says, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins." We'll talk about our abuse of private confession and absolution, which our confessions say that we cherish and use, at another time!

In the Lord's Supper, the pastor says over the bread and wine, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: 'Take eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: 'Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" (LSB 197, Mt 26, Mk 14, Lk 22, 1 Cor 11) And then he distributes the bread and wine to be eaten and drunk. Jesus doesn't tell us how often to partake of the Lord's Supper, but He says, "as often as you drink it." Historically the church has offered it daily and weekly so that Christians may partake of this wonderful gift as often as their conscience dictates.

If Jesus mandated a particular number of times you had to take His Supper, it would turn the Gospel of forgiveness into a law of obedience. This has been shown historically to be true. The Roman Catholic Pope mandates once a year, and what do many Christians do? They take it once a year. In the Large Catechism, Luther loosely recommended taking the Lord's Supper at least four times a year. And what do many Christians do? They have taken it once a quarter!

We usually offer it weekly so that you may partake of this wonderful gift as you feel the need for it. I love Luther's response to the question, "But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the [Lord's Supper]?"

"To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first, he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15–16 and in 1 John 2 and 5.

Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2."

Our Dear Father in heaven has chastised us with a fast from this precious gift for a little while.

Be assured, you're not sinning by not having the Lord's Supper right now. This fast from the Supper is a gift from the Lord. And I pray that it leads many to repentance for abusing this precious gift.

Just as regular food tastes fantastic after a fast, our Lord's Supper will taste fantastic after this fast that has been forced upon us.

What a glorious day that will be when we are again gathered together around our Lord's altar. I know that you look forward to that day as much as I do.

Our Lord commands us to love one another as He loved us in our reading today. I love how St. Cyril of Jerusalem ties these together in his teaching on the Sacraments:

“Having received the body and blood of Christ, you may become [His] one body and one blood of Christ. For in this way we become “Christ-bearers,” His body and His blood having been given into our bodily members. Thus, according to blessed Peter, we become “sharers of the divine nature. (2 Ptr 1:4)” (Lectures on the Christian Sacraments, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, p. 115)

We become Christobpers, that is, “Christ-bearers” and we deliver Christ to others in loving service. And like the other mandates of our Lord, we don't insist that it be done our way, but our Lord's way.

You serve the neighbor that is in front of you out of your station in life, that is, out of your vocation, with whatever your neighbor's need actually is.

As John puts it in his first epistle, “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” (1 Jn 3:16-18)

You know the love of Jesus through His precious Word and Sacraments. You live the love of Jesus through fervent love to your neighbor.

And your Father in heaven is glorified.

In Jesus' name. Amen.