

## **“Do This in Memory of Me’ – That’s What It’s All About”**

*Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper*

*April 17, 2014, St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral*

### **Introduction**

Recently when I was helping out serving supper to the poor and destitute at one of our parishes, I struck up a conversation with one of those being served. He marveled at what was taking place, and compared it to Jesus serving the apostles at the Last Supper (washing their feet). He commented on the commandment that Jesus gave them that evening, “Do this in memory of me.” And then he said: “That’s what it’s all about, ‘Do this in memory of me.’” Of course I agreed with him; in fact, I couldn’t have said it better myself. There are real pearls of wisdom out on the streets!

### **The Fuller Meaning**

Yes, that’s what it’s all about, *but*, this only makes sense when we fully understand what the “this” is, in “Do *this* in memory of me.” Yes, our Lord gives us this command on this night when instituted the Holy Eucharist, to be a memorial of his suffering, death and Resurrection, and an assurance of his abiding presence among us. But there is something more going on here – he did not just mean for us to repeat a ritual action, or to just sort of fondly and gratefully bring to mind all that he has done for us.

The Church brings this point home to us by the Gospel reading she offers us for this Holy Thursday liturgy: not the account of the institution of the Eucharist as found in the three synoptic gospels (that is brought out in the Second Reading, in St. Paul’s account of it in First Corinthians), but rather St. John’s account of what happened at that supper, which we will shortly re-enact here. Notice how Jesus humbles himself at this meal. First, he is the master, and he washes the feet of his disciples. Foot-washing was considered the lowest of all of the duties of a servant, and yet here, the master, is the one to lower himself to do this for his servants. Second, Jesus removes his outer garment, that is, he strips himself, exposing himself, making himself vulnerable. He voluntarily embraces poverty in this way, in order to give his all. Finally, he had to literally bow down, physically lower himself, in order to reach his disciples’ feet to wash them.

This all points to a much broader understanding of all that Holy Thursday is about. Pope Emeritus Benedict made reference to this in the last homily he gave on this occasion, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper in 2012. He said there:

Holy Thursday is not only the day of the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist, whose splendor bathes all else and in some ways draws it to itself. To Holy Thursday also belongs the dark night of the Mount of Olives, to which Jesus goes with his disciples; the solitude and abandonment of Jesus, who in prayer goes forth to encounter the darkness of death;

the betrayal of Judas, Jesus' arrest and his denial by Peter; his indictment before the Sanhedrin and his being handed over to the Gentiles, to Pilate. Let us try at this hour to understand more deeply something of these events, for in them the mystery of our redemption takes place.

### **Realized in Our Lives**

All of this is what that washing of the disciples' feet symbolized: all that Jesus would freely endure for us, giving his all for us – that is his service, his ultimate self-abasement, lowering himself to the point of death, death on a cross. This is the pattern that Jesus sets for us, and this is what he commands us to do in his memory. It is, then, the simple and constantly-repeated message of realizing in our lives, beyond the four walls of this church, the mystery we celebrate here in the Eucharist, the most precious gift which our Lord gave us this night.

At the conclusion of our Mass, we will process with that most precious gift, with the Blessed Sacrament, to the altar of repose, to commemorate our Lord's going out from the upper room and spending the night in the Garden of Gethsemane. In ritual we will accompany him, we will go with him into the darkness, into solitude and abandonment, to be betrayed and condemned, all for us, so that we could live with him forever. Let us accompany him with our hearts and whole lives, that our worship here not be an empty ritual, but an authentic expression of our love for our Lord.

### **Conclusion**

It is, then, the "this" in the "Do this in memory of me" that is what it is all about: the "this" of our whole lives. In all that we do – from the littlest, simplest things such as chores around the house or our diligence and honesty in the workplace, to the biggest life-defining moments such as committing one's entire life and love to another "until death do us part" or exercising a heroic act of virtue to save another at great risk to oneself, in giving and forgiving, in the dark moments of life and when we bask in the light – in *all* that we do, that we do it in union with the Lord Jesus, after the pattern set by the Lord Jesus, and for the Lord Jesus. And that's what it's all about: the Lord Jesus, and our love for him, all the way to the end, all the way to death, because that is the door to eternal life.