

Holy Thursday

29<sup>th</sup> March 2018

‘Eucharist & Service: love of God & love of neighbour’

Ex 12: the Passover instructions    Ps 115: *the cup of salvation I will raise*

1Cor 11: *this is what I received and in turn passed on to you ...*

Jn 13: 1–15: *if I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.*

One of the things I have most enjoyed this Lent has been our Wednesday-morning reflection group. We used the diocesan meditation book written by a priest of our diocese, Fr Stephan Wang, and illustrated by his late mother, Elizabeth Wang, a Catholic artist from Harpenden who died a couple of years ago. At the last session, we were thinking about the interplay between the Mass and the ‘mission,’ i.e. the fact that the lessons and blessings of the Eucharist must necessarily lead out to Christian action in the wider Church and the world. In particular we were reminded that where the other Gospels focus at the Last Supper principally on the institution of the Eucharist — the new Sacrament of His sacrificed Body & Blood — St John’s Gospel emphasizes the Washing of the Feet, as we have just heard. But, as Fr Stephen said, in his text, “There is no contradiction between St John and the other Gospels; in fact, there is a great unity. We understand that the self-giving love of the Eucharist,

which looks forward to the sacrifice of the Cross, is inseparable from a self-giving love for one’s neighbour.”

These two great elements of the Mass of the Last Supper — the institution of the Eucharist and Priesthood, and the Washing of the Feet — are two sides of the same divine teaching. The first is a key part of the new Covenant, the renewed way of loving God; the second is a bold example of the love of neighbour. Love of God, and love of neighbour: as always, Our Lord is insisting on them both; not one or other, but both. We need both the holy Mass at the centre of our lives, and also the daily, willing, service of other people. Our life cannot have one without the other without its becoming lopsided and false. The Mass leads us out to our service of fellow men and women; and then that active life of love, with all the worries that it can bring, leads us back in to the Mass, where we seek from the Lord consolation, and spiritual nourishment. Back and forth, back and forth: in to the profound prayer of the Mass, and out again on to the mission; in again to encounter the Lord in the Holy Eucharist, His Real Presence, and out

again to encounter the Lord in His needy people. The Mass, in fact, gives us that spiritual energy to face the challenges of life, and gives us a refill of Christ's love that allows us to reach out tirelessly to our neighbour in love.

Where would we be without the Mass? Whether you have grown up with the Mass since your youngest days, or whether you have come into contact with the Catholic Church in more recent years, you, and all of us have learnt to love the Mass with all our hearts, and we could not imagine life without this saving Sacrament. Our devotion to the sacred, real, and abiding Presence of Jesus the Son God in the Holy Eucharist is the most precious thing that we have, and it is the greatest gift of Christ to His Church: His very own self, given as the food of our soul. But the lesson of this Last-Supper Mass is that the love of neighbour cannot be neglected as second best, second rate, dispensable. If we are coming to Mass, keeping the Lord's Day holy with our devout love for Jesus who gave His life for us, then we must take inspiration from His holy presence within us to do as He did: to wash one another's feet, to

serve one another. Peter reacted negatively to Jesus's attempts to wash His feet; he thought it unworthy of His Lord and Master ... But Jesus insisted. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many" ... "If I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Jesus has not flinched from the most servile of tasks to care for His people, and nor must we. We may need to care for the bodily needs of our little ones, and our elderly frail relatives ... or we may need simply to give charitably to assist our poorest brothers and sisters have some food, water and shelter. This is doing just as Jesus did, and it flows directly from the love which is given in such abundance to us by Jesus in the Mass. Let us be re-committed at this Holy Thursday evening Mass both in our love for the Eucharist, and in our love for the neediest of our neighbours. *Jesus, teach us the lessons of your Last Supper ... Do not let us leave this Holy Mass tonight untouched and unchanged. Let Your infinite love bathe us in new hope, new faith, new loving ...*