

Homily
The Mass of the Lord's Supper, 1st April 2021
John 13: 1-15

Tonight, the Church begins her solemn celebration of the Paschal mystery of our Saviour Jesus Christ. It is true, like last year, we are all still struggling with one of the biggest challenges in human history ever as we continue to deal with the Coronavirus crisis. But still, on this blessed night, on this holy night, we are spiritually gathering together as a family from our own homes once again in that upper room with Jesus and the apostles, and we celebrate in this sacred Liturgy, in this solemn liturgy, that great act of the Last supper.

A few years back, I remember seeing a film called "The Pianist" and it was the story, a true story of a very famous musician in Poland who played the Piano for the Polish National Radio Station. His family was Jewish and in the film it depicts how the family is arrested and taken to the rail road station where they're waiting in these areas almost like cuddled, fenced in, to be put on the train to be taken to the concentration camps. And the father of this family collects all the money that all of them have, and

with that money he was able to buy only a small piece of chocolate.

And that was because, the people who were selling to these refugees were gouging them, were charging exorbitant amount of money for practically nothing. Though they were able to buy only a small piece of chocolate, they were not let down. The father of the family now broke this up, and gave a piece to each of the members in his family. Well! I was so moved by that scene. It was truly a Passover meal for that family. It was their last supper and it was a sign of the love and the unity that they experienced even in the face of such evil and such darkness.

Well! Dear brothers and sisters, we commemorate in this sacred liturgy tonight, what Christ accomplished in that upper room on the night before He was to offer His life for the salvation of the world. And in particular tonight, we are reminded of some very great gifts that the Lord gives us. He gives us the gift of the priesthood. We are reminded of the gift of the Lord Himself in the most Blessed Sacrament in the Holy Eucharist. And we also celebrate the gift of the Lord's commandment to fraternal charity as evident in the Lord's washing of the feet which

unfortunately we cannot reenact in any of our churches this year, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, what is the essential theme that runs through all these three events, namely, the priesthood, the Eucharist and the washing of the feet? It is nothing but love and presence. Yes! The common theme that runs through every single one of them, the priesthood, the Eucharist and the commandment to fraternal charity is all about people being present to one another in love, and God being present to us in love.

My father who died on the 8th of January last year, used to ask me every time I spoke to him over the phone from here: “Son, when are you coming home?”. He was not asking me about material things, but speaking to me of “presence”. And of course, my telephone calls to my home back in India are in fact true gestures through which I tell my dear and near ones that I am with them and they are with me in my thoughts and in my prayers. And as a priest, I do bring them to the altar every day when I celebrate the Holy Mass. It is all about being together and being near even when distanced. It is all about being present even when we feel the other is apparently absent.

Well! Christ's presence reaches its culmination in the gift of the Eucharist. Or, what could be more present than God Himself who comes in the form of bread and wine that would change into His own very body and blood to be with us and to be that abiding presence to touch our lives and to touch our hearts. And it is the presence of God that makes it an amazing Sacrament which completely and totally transforms our lives. And it is the presence of God in the Sacrament that enables us to live out this commandment to fraternal charity. And this charity, this washing of the feet is obviously not something we do for someone else just as a function. It is all about building relationships and bringing God to others through relationships.

Story is told of a young man who went to meet an old monk. The old monk was very friendly. And so the young man felt quite comfortable to ask him a number of questions about faith. Finally, just before taking leave of the old monk, the young man turned to him and asked: "Father, I would like to ask you a final question. What is the greatest mistake you have made in your life?" And this old monk with great humility replied: "They call me a Christian, but I have not become Christ like".

The moment we become truly Christ-like dear friends, we will be able to bring Christ to our brothers and sisters we encounter in our day to day life. And the whole world is actually experiencing that in a tangible way these days as our doctors, nurses, medical professionals and all those on the frontline of healthcare are continuing to serve the sick and the dying risking their own lives, and as the essential services personnel are still out in the field giving their time and energy for others forgetting about their own safety and security.

Well! As we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper this year, exactly like last year, in a different way with no congregation physically present in any of the Churches, let us stay assured of the fact that our priests throughout the world are bringing us and placing us and our families on the Altar in a way probably they have never done before. And this Holy Thursday day will go down in history as a day on which our own homes became temples and churches letting Jesus stay at our homes in a truly unusual way; a day on which we longed to receive Jesus in the form of a little bread in holy communion, and yet in our helplessness, he comes into our hearts in Spiritual Communion. Let us then thank Him for His love and for His presence. God bless you all, **Amen.**

