



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 27 March 1997 1. Each year this Basilica of Saint John Lateran welcomes the assembly gathered for the solemn Memorial of the Last Supper. From the City of Rome and from throughout the world the faithful come to renew the memory of the event which took place in the Upper Room on that Thursday so many years ago, an event which the Liturgy commemorates today as ever present. It continues to be present as the Sacrament of the Altar, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. It continues to be present as the Eucharist. We are called together in the first place to repeat the gesture which Christ performed at the beginning of the Last Supper: the washing of the feet. The Gospel of John has once more offered for our consideration Peter's reluctance to have the Master humble himself, and the teaching by which Christ explained this gesture: "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (13:13-15). *When the time comes for the Eucharistic Banquet, Christ again stresses the need to serve.* "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). We are called together, then, to express anew the living memorial of the greatest commandment, the commandment of love: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). Christ's gesture is a living presentation of this to the Apostles: "His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father"; the hour of greatest love: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). 2. All this reaches its culmination at the Last Supper, in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. We have been called together *to re-live this event, the institution of the marvellous Sacrament from which the Church never ceases to draw life*, the Sacrament which, at the level of the most authentic and profound reality, constitutes the Church. There is no Eucharist without the Church, but, even before that, there is no Church without the Eucharist. Eucharist means *thanksgiving*. That is why we have prayed in the Responsorial Psalm: "How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?" (cf. Psalm 116:12). We present on the altar the offerings of bread and wine, as an unending act of thanksgiving for all the blessings we have received from God, for the blessings of creation and redemption. Our Redemption has been wrought by the Sacrifice of Christ. The Church, which proclaims this Redemption and draws her life from it, must continue to make this Sacrifice sacramentally present, from this Sacrifice she must draw the strength to be herself. 3. The Eucharistic Celebration in *Cena Domini* reminds us of this with singular eloquence. The first reading, taken from the Book of Exodus, calls to mind that moment in the history of the people of the Old Covenant which most clearly foreshadowed the mystery of the Eucharist: the episode of the institution of the Passover. The people were to be freed from slavery in Egypt, they were to leave the land of slavery in freedom and the price of their ransom was the blood of the lamb. That lamb of the Old Covenant found its fullness of meaning in the New Covenant. This was brought about also through the prophetic ministry

of John the Baptist, who, pointing to Jesus of Nazareth as he came to the River Jordan to be baptized, had said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). It is no coincidence that these words are found at the centre of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The readings of this Holy Mass of the Lord's Supper remind us of them, to show us that *by this living Memorial we are entering the hour of Christ's Passion*. It is precisely at this hour that *the mystery of the Lamb of God* will be revealed. The words spoken by the Baptist at the Jordan will thus receive their clear fulfilment. Christ is going to be crucified. As Son of God he will accept death, in order to free the world from sin. Let us open our hearts, let us take part with faith in the great mystery and let us proclaim, with the whole Church called together in this Eucharistic assembly: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again". © Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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