

## **Homily for the Mass of the Lord's Supper**

This evening marks the beginning of the “Easter Triduum,” the three days of prayerful reflection on Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. Today, Holy Thursday, the Church commemorates the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. And having commanded His Twelve Disciples to “do this in memory of Him”, also instituted the priesthood. But, this evening, we can see that another sacrament is also intimately connected with today’s feast – namely, the sacrament of matrimony, or marriage.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in one of his works on the liturgy, “In the Eucharist a communion takes place that corresponds to the union of man and woman in marriage. Just as they become ‘one flesh,’ so in Holy Communion, we all become ‘one spirit,’ one person, with Christ.” In the words of Eucharistic Prayer III – “grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son, and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

Now, lest you think this is all just theological niceties, let me share with you the following beautiful story. At Mass the day after a young groom’s wedding, having consummated his marriage the night before, he came back to the pew after having received Holy Communion with his eyes full of tears. When his new bride asked him about this, he said, “For the first time in my life I understood the meaning of those words, ‘This is my body given for you.’”

Or, how about the following connection? What will take place this evening before our actual celebration of the Eucharist? The washing of the feet. Now, Jesus did this as a great sign to show what it really means to love another – that is, to serve the beloved, to sacrifice for him or her. And since Jesus told His followers then, “As I have done for you, you should also do”, I’ve learned about this emerging tradition. At the wedding reception, in place of hiking down the garter and throwing the bouquet of flowers, various couples have chosen to wash one another’s feet. If you’ve ever seen it, it’s truly a beautiful sign of the call of self-sacrificing love between husband and wife.

But, this whole connection between the Eucharist and matrimony is more than just about particular marriages. It’s also about the reality for which every sacramental marriage is meant to represent – the perfect love of Jesus, the Bridegroom, for His bride, the Church. And since sacrifice is the key component of real love, so is perfect sacrifice required of perfect love. And on the cross, Christ gave the ultimate sacrifice – His very self. But after He died, while still hanging from the Cross, Scripture tells us that a soldier pierced His side to ensure that He was dead. And what flowed out from His opened side was blood and water.

Why blood *and* water? Because blood and water are symbols of the Sacraments of the Church. By Baptism, the water, and the Eucharist, the Blood, all of mankind has been invited to enter into the Church and thus, into communion with God – an actual spousal union.

Also, think back to how Eve was formed in the beginning – from a rib from the side of Adam. In the Old Covenant, the first wife came from the side of the first husband. Now in the New Covenant, the bride is born from the side of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Just as a husband and a wife give themselves entirely to each other in the marital act, so too Christ, the Bridegroom, offers Himself entirely to His bride, the Church – Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

My friends, our Savior loves us so much. He is willing to humble Himself to make Himself sacramentally present in the Eucharist at Mass. He truly gives Himself away, and we are to return the gift. We are called to give ourselves completely back to Him, to let Him be the Lord over every part of our lives. And so, the call to sincere self-giving love between husband and wife and the very gift given to us in the Eucharist are both meant to remind all of us of how we are to love our amazing God. God bless you.