

Homily of the Mass of Lord's Supper – 2011

Fr Paul Johnson

Readings: Ex 12:1-8, 11-14, Ps 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18, 1 Cor 11:23-26, Jn 13:1-15

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“Do This in Memory of Me”

There is a common theme emerging as we listen to the Word of God this very evening and it is quite simple. It is an instruction, if you like, based upon the teachings of Our Lord. Strictly speaking it is more a mystery than an instruction. You might be forgiven for thinking it is the act of charity, of service to our brothers and sisters as we'll see when Fr Tom washes feet in a few minutes. Yet charity, or love, or service is only a part of this evening's theme.

Perhaps you might consider it is the institution of the Eucharist. In a sense this is, indeed, the mystery to which I allude. But Jesus' actions, which we read about in St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, speak seemingly of the Lord celebrating the Last Supper. St Paul does give us the first written record of what happened that fateful night so very long ago, but the eagle-eyed will note the title of the liturgy this evening is not the last supper, rather it is the 'Mass of the Lord's Supper'. There is a most important difference and it rests entirely upon a simple command which Jesus gives not once but twice according to St Paul.

There is a third clue to our theme from this evening's readings and it is the biggest clue of all – the institution of the priesthood. You see, Fr Tom, Fr Andrew and myself ought to be engaging in great celebrations this night as we recall it was this very night that Jesus instituted the ministerial priesthood in which we share. If it were not for this night, then our own ordination would make no sense at all and so I'm sure that we will each take a moment to give thanks for our priesthood as we sit watching with the Lord later in the evening. I would hope that we will not be alone, and you too will share in thanking God for the great gift of the priesthood. A gift which has, all too sadly, been abused in the past for which we must make reparation, but such a gift is to be cherished and nurtured.

But this wonderful gift of service to our brothers and sisters; the institution of the Eucharist and the institution of the priesthood all flow from one simple expression: A mystery which is foretold in the Passover that the Israelites celebrated faithfully every year from the time of their liberation from slavery. God commanded the people of Israel to eat together and Jesus tells his disciples to wash each other's feet, which we all must do, but there is one thing that a priest alone can do and that is, of course, act in the person of Christ himself most notably in the celebration of Mass.

Jesus says, and the priest repeats in every Mass: Do this in memory of me. Do this in memory of me – this is our instruction, our mystery. Jesus wants us to come together, led by his priest, not to recreate the last supper, but rather to celebrate the Lord's supper; a point eloquently made by Pope Benedict in his recent book *Jesus of Nazareth*. We celebrate this night, and every day at Mass, not just that Jesus died for our sins but that he rose on the third day, the Lord's Day, and we are to come together and 'Do this in memory of me'.

But what is this thing that we are to do in memory of him? Well, we might take a moment to consider an answer and move on, or we might take a while to think about this, to pray about it and to ask the Lord to give us wisdom, understanding and love of the Mass. We might realise that this coming September we will begin to use a new translation for the words of Mass and whilst things may seem to change they will remain the same as they ever were. We may be blessed to realise when Fr Tom says 'do this in memory of me' tonight we will hear it for the first time, just as the disciples did so long ago because he will speak the words of Jesus himself and Jesus sends to us a priest who has the power and authority to make present the body and blood of Christ that we might be renewed. That we might pray for one another that our faith may be strengthened, that we may thank God.

Thank God for the priesthood, thank God for the Eucharist, thank God for his command to wash one another's feet, but above all, thank God that Jesus says, 'do this in memory of me' to you to I.