

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In our second reading this evening from I Corinthians, St. Paul provides us with the earliest known description of the Lord's Supper. However, I did hear of another version of what really happened at that meal, which may or may not have been more exact.

As Jesus looked around the table, he looked at each of his disciples. At one end of the table was Judas Iscariot, who he knew would betray him before the night was out. At his side was Peter, who he knew would deny him, not once, but three times, before the sun came up. Across the table was Thomas who would doubt that he had indeed risen from the dead. As his gaze went from one to the other, the Lord began to question his wisdom in choosing these characters as his Apostles. He shook his head, then nodded to the waiter, and said, "Yo! Max, give us separate checks."

Well, that may or may not be how you or I would have handled the situation, but I'm sure that isn't what was in the Lord's mind or heart. St. John, an eyewitness to the event, tells us the first thing that Jesus did on the occasion of this Passover meal, he took on the work of the Servant—He, the host, stripped himself down to the lowly dress of a slave, bent to the ground, to provide the ceremonial washing of the feet of the guests, which was a work of hospitality, usually reserved to the servants or the children of a household. It was the warmest welcome one could receive on entering into the home and the life of a family.

This was the first lesson of what we call The Lord's Supper. Jesus wants to make sure his disciples and we understand the meaning of this work of hospitality. He asks, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me teacher and master, and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

It is so important for us to realize whose feet he washed. He washed the feet of Judas who would betray him; Peter who would deny him; Thomas who would doubt him; the others (except for John) who would run and hide in his hour of need. His Apostles were so much like us—weak, sinful, afraid, doubting, He knew that about them, as He knows that about us. Still, He chooses to serve them and us in the most humble of ways. In doing so, He is modeling how we are to be with each other; how we should relate to others—not just in our church, but in our homes, on our jobs, in our schools, on the playing field, in the supermarket, yes, and even in the parking lots.

In real terms that means rather than fighting someone for that parking space, gladly relinquish it to the other, and park a few spaces down the line; it means when a person tries to push ahead of you in the market, gladly make way and assure the person you are happy to yield to his or her greater need; it means gladly accepting the chores at home and doing them when you are asked, rather than putting them off until you feel like it; it means realizing your spouse had as a hard a day as you did at work and offer to help with the household chores—whether it's folding the laundry, doing the dishes, taking out the trash, or helping the kids with their homework.

How much happier would our lives, our homes, our jobs, our schools, our church, and yes, our communities, our nation, and our world be, if we all saw ourselves as servants of each other? That is the genius of this Gospel of Jesus Christ.

After modeling this lesson of humble service, Jesus then reclines at table, “took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Then, St. Paul tells us, “In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Paul concludes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.”

Again, it is worth noting with whom Jesus shared the bread and wine that he calls His “Body given for you”, and “This cup...the new covenant of My Blood.”---weak, sinful, frightened, doubting, imperfect people just like us. But they were the people, as we are the people, He has chosen to continue his work in the world.

As He is about to take up the work of salvation for the whole world, the first thing he does is make an extraordinary investment of himself in the Church. The Church, our Church, is the reason Jesus came into the world. We are the means by which God has planned to transform the world.

St. Paul explains it this way in II Corinthians 5:17-20, “This means that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away, now all is new! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s transgressions against them, and that he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. That makes us ambassadors for Christ. God, as it were, appealing through us.”

We are, therefore, Christ’s ambassadors. God has chosen to reconcile the world through us. Jesus didn’t merely show his confidence in his disciples two thousand years ago. He shows his confidence in you and me, whom he has chosen as his ambassadors for this day, this time, this place in the world. Can you wrap your brains around that? God is counting on you and me to make a difference in the world. God is reconciling the world to Himself through us! This is the second lesson of this Last Supper, as we call it, Christ made the extraordinary investment of Himself in the Church, by making us his ambassadors, the ones called today to reconcile the world to God.

Lastly, the Lord shows us how we are to accomplish this work he has given us. After he blesses the bread and the wine, and says, “Take and eat! This is my Body given for you”, and “Take and drink! “This is my Blood, the Blood of the New Covenant, poured out for you.”: He says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

He showed that this ministry of reconciliation, our ministry of reconciliation, would come about through His Body, broken for us, and His Blood, poured out for us. These He gives to us in a ritual through which we are to remember and be empowered for our calling, our purpose, our ministry, as His ambassadors. This ritual we call The Holy Mass.

Our fulfillment comes in the hope that derives from our participation in this ritual. St. Paul tells us tonight, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.” Our sharing in the Body and Blood of the Lord, Paul is saying, is our blessed assurance that there will come a time when this world will be reconciled to God. Though it is broken, shattered, fragmented at present, the time of its healing and wholeness is assured. Though our world is filled with hatred, strife, violence, and war, it will one day be a world of peace and love. That is Christ’s promise to us this night.

He has given us an example to follow as his ambassadors of reconciliation. As he has laid down his life so that the world might be reconciled to his Father, so He calls us tonight, as his ambassadors, to do the same so that his kingdom of love and light may come upon the earth, as it is in heaven. That is our promise to fulfill in this Holy Mass.