

## HOLY THURSDAY – OLPH 2012

### John 13: 1-15

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When our Lord washed the **feet of his apostles**, he quite deliberately performed a rite that was intended to express a cleansing from sin for all those who would be his disciples. John the Evangelist who has recorded this act of Jesus certainly did so that all believers would realize that the Lord did not hesitate to humble himself to cleanse us for union with himself. His action remains a personal one, directed to each of us individually, just as it was to each of his chosen apostles. It was following this humble service that the Lord referred to his disciples present at the Last Supper as "**my friends.**" The cleansing he effected and symbolized was in view of preparation for a profound union of hearts and minds, a union that is to find its completion in the communion we will share with him and with all those who belong to him.

**Holy Thursday**, in keeping with this rite of purification performed by the Lord, became the **official day of reconciliation** of public sinners in the early Church. This day, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, the Church in a public rite that took place in the Cathedral in the morning, accepted the public penitents back into communion. It is still the law of the Church binding all the faithful that anyone who is aware of any serious sin since a previous confession, must confess it in the sacrament of reconciliation during the Easter season. For every faithful Catholic is obliged to receive the Eucharist during this Paschal Season.

This practice is based on the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper. For by washing the feet of his apostles, he gave a sign of cleansing and reconciliation and then went on to institute this greatest of his sacraments at the **Last Supper**. This evening's liturgy takes us back to the beginnings when the Eucharist was first given to the Church. As he gave the consecrated bread and wine, the Lord also gave an order to his apostles: Do this in memory of me. Uninterruptedly since that first Eucharist his order has been obeyed through the centuries. The Church increased and spread, always keeping the Eucharist as its centre.

We firmly believe that this sacrament is a sign that effects what it symbolizes. It truly makes the Risen Lord Jesus present on the altar where he renews his sacrifice of the cross on our behalf. Because the Eucharist is his very self present in his humanity and his divinity, when we receive it with faith, having been purified from our sins by confession, we enter into an intimate, personal communion with his person. Communion means quite literally that we are made one with him in the depths of our being. Our Catholic faith has remained faithful to this teaching in spite of all the objections that have arisen on the part of those who maintain that the Lord's words are not to be taken literally. It was Jesus himself who refuted this position. So true is it that this sacrament is the centre of the Church's life and anyone who denies this belief is not Catholic in faith, and, according to the Lord's own words, does not possess true life. This dogma is essential for salvation.

Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I shall raise him up on the last day (John 6:53,54).

Not only is the **Eucharist a source of eternal life** for each individual believer, it is also the **life of the Church**. We cannot be in communion with the risen, living Lord without being united with all those who belong to him. The Eucharist is at once the most personal and intimate of the sacraments, and at the same time the most social and inclusive. Holy Thursday is a favoured day for us to renew our faith in these truths, my brothers and sisters, as we commemorate the institution of this great gift of the Lord. We are mindful of the priesthood as well as of the Eucharist, for it is so closely associated with this sacrament. By expressing our heartfelt gratitude to God for these gifts of his love, we will grow in our faith and appreciation of this source of spiritual growth. May we all prove worthy of them by avoiding sin and by leading lives of purity and holiness. Then will we know the joy of the faithful children of God, and assist one another with our prayer and example as we continue our journey through this life to the eternal banquet where the Lord himself is our food and drink, uniting us all in the eternal love of God, the Father.