



Archbishop of Montreal

Homilie

Thursday, April 9, 2020

Holy Thursday (Jn 13:1-15)

Do You Know the Eleventh Commandment?

You will recognize this passage, but perhaps you did not know that this is the Eleventh Commandment given to us by God: “Do this in memory of me.” These are the words spoken by Jesus. “Do this in memory of me. This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is my blood which will be poured out for you. Do this in memory of me. Take, eat. Take it and drink of it. Do this in memory of me.”

Whom addresses Jesus? He addresses the Apostles as the pillars of the church but also as the representatives of the whole Church. His words institute them as priests, but he also addresses the whole church.

By speaking to the whole church, the whole people of God become a priestly people. The apostles are instituted as priests, they are made priests, and the whole church becomes a priestly people.

“Do this in memory of me” is the commandment for both priests and to the whole church to celebrate the Eucharist. Mass is a divine commandment. It is a commandment that comes from Jesus Christ, who is God, who is the Son of God made man.

Praying the Mass, celebrating Mass, and participating in the Eucharist is to respond to God’s call and commandment. Does Jesus say: “I am making you an offer, a suggestion, if you want it, when you want it.” No! “Do this. Do this in memory of me.” The Eucharist, the Mass, is God’s commandment, it is Jesus Christ’s commandment.

When Jesus Christ makes this commandment, is it for his sake? No! It is not for himself! It is for us! It is us who need him. We need Jesus Christ. We need his love. We need his grace. We need the love that is in him. He who loves us to the end, he is always present. “This is my body given,” this is the love that goes to the end that is made present in the Eucharist.

It is the love that gives all and asks for nothing in return that is made present in the Eucharist. It is us who need the Eucharist as the Eucharist becomes nourishment. The table of the Word of God becomes nourishment. The table of the Eucharist becomes nourishment. We are nourished by God himself so that love grows within us and love blossoms within us.

We need the Eucharist. Without Jesus Christ, love cannot begin to blossom in us. It is Jesus Christ who comes to nourish love in us. In some way, the Eucharist is participating in the love of Jesus Christ who loves us to the end. It is to learn with Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, and to walk with him, to imitate Jesus Christ and to love to the end.

And now we see the close connection between the institution of the Eucharist and the washing of the disciple’s feet. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read of the institution of the Eucharist. But in the Gospel of John, we do not read about the institution of the Eucharist. There is a chapter, Chapter Six, which is about the Eucharist. But in the Gospel of John, during the last supper, what we read is about the washing of the feet, it is about service.

By the grace of Jesus Christ, we learn to serve, to serve like Jesus. The Son of God came into the world not to be served but to serve and to give his life.

Therefore, the question is not whether to serve or to go to Mass. It is not that serving and loving one's neighbour is a substitute for going to Mass. Could we honestly say to someone: "Listen, don't eat every day, don't eat so that you have more time to love others, to have more time to help others."

No, you would end up too weak!

If we want to love each other with all our strength, this takes strength. To be strong, we need food. If the body needs nourishment, then the soul needs nourishment, and the heart also needs nourishment. Receiving the Eucharist, the Word of God and the Bread of Life, the bread of the Lord as nourishment, this is to receive the love of God as nourishment.

In the gift of the Eucharist, we receive not only the love by which God loves us, but the love through which we become capable to love. It makes us capable to love. It makes us capable to love and to serve.

During this pandemic, in this COVID-19 situation that is immobilising the whole world, striking our economy, striking our families, striking all activities, non-profit organisations, striking the Church, all different denominations, all different religions. We have all been stripped naked in the face of COVID-19.

From the point of view of our faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ never ceases to come to us, to nourish us by his word and by his body. "This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is my blood which will be poured out for you." Jesus never stops to nourish us.

Although the church doors are closed, the Church is not closed! The doors are closed but the Church is not closed! The church is closed in solidarity with those in danger, with the whole world, considering the danger of contagion. But life continues.

How will we love one another while physically distancing as we are? Well, we need to find new ways to love because we are always called upon to love. Our vocation to love does not end because we are on pause. The vocation to love continues.

How do we pray? This is a major question for a Christian, for a Catholic. How do we pray now, having the habit of going to church to pray?

We know that we can pray with our family and we could do it more often. We know that we can also read the Word of God and we could do it more often. Even while we do what the special circumstances invite us to do, what do we make of our relationship with the Eucharist?

In a paradoxical way, right now, while we are not fasting in preparation for the Eucharist but fasting from receiving Eucharist, we can ask the Holy Spirit for grace to enflame our hearts. The flame of desire to receive the Eucharist.

We can ask the Holy Spirit to let grow in the hearts of all the baptized, all priests, the whole people of God, all of us together, to let grow in them our faith in the Eucharist and our desire to receive the Eucharist.

Perhaps this is the occasion to review our lives. When we can go to Mass, we can take it for granted that the church doors will be open on Sundays or weekdays. When we take it for granted, how can we become aware of it?

Perhaps by reviewing our lives? Perhaps by becoming aware of our thirst for the Eucharist?

Perhaps we should ask for the grace that our thirst for the Eucharist be revived, because one takes for granted what is accessible every day. But now, this has stopped and the familiar is no longer there. How do we ask for the grace not to take God's gift for granted, not to take the Eucharist for granted?

On the contrary, as we expand our ways of prayer, we as expand our ways of loving, let us rediscover that Jesus Christ is really the center of our life and of our faith. Let the Eucharist really be the center, the source and the summit of the Church and our life as was said by the Second Vatican Council.

Currently, priests have the privilege of having access to the Eucharist. They are called to celebrate Mass each day, but the faithful are away. The priests miss their contact with the people of God. This absence of the faithful from the Eucharist lets the hearts of priests grow, to grow as they thirst to be closer to the people of God. The Eucharist takes all its meaning from the presence of the people of God, because the Church is in the service of all humanity.

We can ask the Lord to increase our thirst for the real presence of the Eucharist with the help of a prayer that will increase this thirst. It is a prayer of spiritual communion in which we express our faith in Jesus Christ, present in the Eucharist. At the same time, this prayer asks that the Lord gives us an ever-increasing thirst for the Eucharist.

Therefore, at communion time, there will be a moment just before the priests take communion. At that time, we will recite a prayer of spiritual communion. I invite you to listen and to participate and to really make a spiritual communion. A spiritual communion does not replace the Eucharistic communion. Spiritual communion renews our faith in the Eucharist, our faith in Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. It renews our thirst for Jesus Christ and encounter with Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal