

+ MAUNDY THURSDAY: IN CENA DOMINI

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
March 29, 2018

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My very dear sons,

The entire Catholic Church gathers today to celebrate a most solemn moment in the liturgical year. The sacred actions and words of the Lord on the occasion of His impending Passion have changed the world forever and will resound throughout the centuries until the end of time, as long as one faithful Christian keeps this mystery in his or her heart, as long as at least one honest man remains alive to remember these tremendous things. Never did the words of a mere mortal, whether philosopher, statesman, or poet, so move the human race to honor and adore God in spirit and in truth as did and still do the words recorded by Saint John in the great discourse of farewell we have in chapters 14-17 of his Gospel. “Let not your heart be troubled,” He said, “You believe in God, believe also in me.”¹

More powerful even than that great discourse of the Lord recorded by Saint John, however, was the Institution of the Most Holy Eucharist itself, the Holy Sacrifice of Mass. Here is a mystery so great that no man can sound its secrets. Under the grace of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, we can enter little by little into an understanding of the Blessed Sacrament, but there is always more to it, greater depths to explore. In this process of entering into the secrets of God’s revelation, of “putting out into the deep,” the saints along the centuries come to our aid and add their inspired insights.

One such saint was a nun, who was beatified and canonized by her compatriot Saint John Paul II, and who is known as the Apostle of Divine Mercy. She relates some astounding insights about the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament in her famous *Diary*.

During this hour of prayer, Jesus allowed me to enter the Cenacle, and I was a witness to what happened there.... I was most deeply moved when, before the Consecration, Jesus raised His eyes to heaven and entered into mysterious conversation with His Father. It is only in eternity that we shall really understand that moment. His eyes were like two flames; His face was radiant, white as snow; His whole personage full of majesty, His soul full of longing. At the moment of Consecration, love rested satiated – the sacrifice fully consummated. Now only the external ceremony of death will be carried out – external destruction; the essence [of it] is in the Cenacle. Never in my whole life had I understood this mystery so profoundly as during that hour of adoration. Oh, how ardently I desire that the whole world would come to know this unfathomable mystery!²

Now, such words must be interpreted in the context of the entire tradition of the Church: Saint Faustina is surely not implying that Our Lord’s terrible Passion and Death on the wood of the Cross were somehow superfluous or just an afterthought following the Last Supper. But the idea of “love rest[ing] satiated, the sacrifice fully consummated...[at the moment of Consecration]” already in the Upper Room certainly gives us food for thought on this Holy

¹ Jn 14:1.

² Saint Faustina, *Diary*, Notebook II, n. 684.

Thursday. The linear and limited horizon of our human thinking is ever challenged by the high purposes of Divine Wisdom. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord” in Isaiah.³ However, aided by the grace of God in the light of the Holy Spirit, we will be able, perhaps, to understand something of the mystery.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, explains the theological connection between the Supper and the Sacrifice of Calvary in his book, *Journey Towards Easter*:

The death of Jesus...., he writes, affords us the key to understanding the Last Supper, and the Supper is the anticipation of the death.... The death without the Supper would be empty, without meaning; the Supper without the actual realization of the death it anticipated would be a gesture without reality. Supper and Cross together are the only and inseparable source of the Eucharist. The Eucharist does not spring from the Supper alone; it springs from this oneness of Supper and Cross, as St John shows in his great image of the oneness of Jesus, Church and sacraments: that from the pierced side of the Lord “there came out blood and water” (19:34): Baptism and Eucharist, the Church, the new Eve.⁴

In this perspective then, what could Saint Faustina mean, when she says that, at the moment of the Consecration of the first Mass, “love was satiated”? God as such is always love itself, love in its highest degree. His love is always satiated, fulfilled, perfect. Christ, in his human nature, however, can hunger and thirst, not only for food, but also for love. “I thirst,” He said on the Cross,⁵ and His thirst was not just for water, but more importantly for the salvation of souls. Sadly, since the sin of our first parents, all human efforts to repay God for the love that prompted Him, first to create us, then to redeem us back from the death of sin, were inefficacious, sorely inadequate. Only God, only a Divine Person – in this case the Son, Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity – could “buy back” as it were (the meaning of the word “redemption”) the fallen human race that had offended its Creator. And here at last, after many millennia of crimes and wars of every sort, here at last, after the prayers, tears, and sighs of so many prophets and righteous men and women, here was the decisive action of the God-Man, the sacrifice that would make reparation in love for the hurt done by sin. Love was satiated, because the Father had found the means of bringing mankind back to Him, and His Son had accomplished the great task. Here at last love was satiated in a mysterious connection between Calvary on the one hand, and the same sacrifice sacramentally anticipated in the Cenacle on Good Thursday.

In the end, instead of simply granting amnesty to the race of Adam, instead of just saying, “Well let’s just forget about the sins that have so darkened human history: we will just pretend none of that ever happened”, instead of that, God in His deep designs decided to provide for a price to be paid, as the Apostle Saint Peter explains in one of his Letters:

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, from your vain conversation of the tradition of your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled.⁶

This price of our salvation, this precious Blood, will not be poured out tomorrow because God has somehow to answer to the devil for us, but as a more magnificent act of Divine Mercy that covers both justice and love in a way worthy of God. And it is all mysteriously preordained and contained in the Most Holy Eucharist – loved satiated. Amen.

³ Is. 55:8.

⁴ Ratzinger, *Journey Towards Easter* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 105.

⁵ Jn 19:28.

⁶ I Pet. 1:18-19.

