



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, April 17th, 2025)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

IN THE *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Romano Guardini writes: “The liturgy is none other than truth, truth expressed under the clothing of prayer.” The Paschal Triduum that opens today brings us, through the rites it unfolds, as close as possible to the Lord, Who is the Truth, at the moment when He offers His life for our salvation. During the next hours, we shall commemorate the moments when Christ, the Son of God, true God and true man, instituted the Eucharist, lived His Passion, died, and rose again.

The Church invites us to consider these days as a single mystery, the Paschal mystery, the Lord’s Passover from death to life.

But what is a mystery? It is a truth that includes a hidden aspect, something that cannot be immediately grasped, something that escapes us. Thus the Lord’s resurrection remains a mystery. The soldier who pierced with a stroke of his spear the heart of the Crucified One can bear witness: He truly died. The holy women, the Apostles, the pilgrims of Emmaus, and many other witnesses will confirm this: He is alive. Thus remains the question: How did He rise again?

The Church invites us to take a further step. If Christ is risen, if He instituted the Eucharist, it isn't for Himself, but for us. Acknowledging the mystery is not enough. We have to enter into communion with the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection, and the mode of this communion is itself a mystery, too.

In that, many of our contemporaries might find difficulties to practise their religion, leading them to relativise the Lord's teachings. If we needed to be convinced of this difficulty, let's remember that the Apostles, who had witnessed many miracles, forsook their Master when it came to following Him to the Calvary.

Where do we stand in terms of following Christ, whereas the Church invites us to take once again our faith seriously? This entails a liturgical catechesis, founded on the memory of the last moments, especially the last Supper the Lord shared with His disciples before entering the fearful hours of His Passion. Two particularly expressive rites mark this moment: the washing of the feet, and the commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist.

The rite of the washing of the feet is told by St. John in chapter 13th of his gospel. This chapter opens the part of the gospel commonly called *the Book of the Hour of Jesus*, or *of the Glory*. A verse marks the transition:

a. *Jn* 13:1. Before the festival day of the Pasch, Jesus knowing that His hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.^a

The Lord had already borne witness of His love for man through His teachings and miracles. The narrative of these teachings and miracles was the purpose of the first part of St. John's gospel. Now, the Lord wants to leave us the testimony of love "unto the end", namely unto the gift, the sharing of His own life. That is His hour.

The Lord then takes a towel and girds Himself, then washes the feet of each one of His disciples. He kneels before them, carrying out a task left for servants. Peter is

astonished, and rightly so, but he doesn't pay attention to the Lord's answer: "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."^b There is the mystery, which Jesus explains: "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with Me."^c

b. v. 7.

c. v. 8.

Through this gesture, it is the whole mystery of Incarnation that is summed up. St. Paul will take this up in the hymn found in Philippians we have just sung as a Gradual: "Christ became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."^d

d. Ph 2:8.

How could we not see there the sacrament of penance, too, by which the Lord purifies the heart of man? The physician is kneeling down before His patient. For those who dare open wide the floodgates of their sick hearts, evil flows towards the Lord Who makes Himself "sin for us^e," Who takes on Himself our misery and offers us mercy, the gift of the Father. How paradoxical: whereas the tempter despises, crushes, and humiliates his victim, Christ, on the contrary, kneels down before those He wants to raise from their misery. Let us remember that when our path towards the sacrament of penance becomes difficult.

e. Cf. 2 Co 5:21.

Last, the Lord concludes His gesture with a teaching:

If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. [...] If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them.^f

f. Jn 13:14.17.

Let us also remember that, as the Lord forgives us, it behoves us to forgive. What the Lord carries out when He restores the relationship between man and God, it behoves us analogically to carry out with our neighbour. Thus, he in whom Christ lives, carries out Christ's works.

It is also our remit to feed this life. Such is the purpose of the sacrament of the Eucharist, by which Christ feeds us with His body and blood, and gives us part to His life.

At the end of the supper, the Lord instituted the Eucharist. Its narrative is well-known, maybe too much. Are we still paying attention to the words we hear when the priest is about to give us holy communion?

May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep your soul unto life everlasting. Amen.

Faced with such goodness, what shall we say? Let's listen to Bl. Carlo Acutis, whom the Church will soon add to the calendar of the saints, and who lived in an intimate friendship with God:

In the Eucharist the Lord looks at me. And I look at him. This look makes me richer. I allow the Lord to observe me, to burrow in me, to mould my soul, to shape it. He is so present, it's not an invention. He is there. If everyone could become aware of this, they would all rush towards Him. If all believed this truth, how their existence would be improved.^g

*g. Hubert LELIÈVRE,
31 jours avec Carlo Acutis
[31 Days with Carlo
Acutis], 5th day.*

Let us live from the Paschal mystery. Let's allow it to radiate around us. We shall never exhaust the gifts of God.

Our pilgrimage on earth, our hope, go through Christ, Christ Who is knocking on the door of our hearts, of our families and communities.

During these days when we are going to solemnly celebrate the Paschal mystery, may Our Lady be the discreet guide who will lead us near the heart of her Son, so that we may draw there food for everlasting life, from now on and forever.

Amen.

