



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Reverend Gustavo García-Siller



Homily – Holy Thursday

April 2, 2015

You and I have been invited this evening to the Upper Room in Jerusalem to join Jesus and his disciples. Look attentively. What do we see and whom do we see? We observe them at table, dining at the Last Supper. We also see Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

Who are these disciples? Uncomprehending Philip who asks questions and does not understand the answers. Doubting Thomas who wants physical proof before he believes anything. Ambitious James and John who desire the most important places at Jesus' side. Impulsive Simon Peter, who boldly proclaims that he will lay down his life for Jesus, but in a few hours, will deny three times that he even knows him. And Judas Iscariot who has already begun to betray the Lord. Why did Jesus not choose better companions, more reliable apostles?! Also present, however, is the beloved disciple, the one whom Jesus can trust. Which of the disciples do you and I resemble? . . .

Now let us focus on Jesus and his actions. Today's gospel opens with the words: "Before the Feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end." We are first introduced to the "hour" of Jesus at the marriage feast of Cana, near the beginning of John's Gospel. The "hour" is not simply sixty minutes. It is the sacred time of Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit – it is a summary of the paschal mystery happening as a single saving event. Jesus, the new Passover Lamb, is about to pass over, from this world back to his heavenly Father through his death. He loves his own and loves them to the very end, when he breathes his last on the cross.

Later at the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. . . You are [not slaves but] friends" (15:12-14). These imperfect, limited disciples are now called **friends** of Jesus who loves them very much – even though he knows each of them and their weaknesses all too well!

Then, surprising them, Jesus washes their feet. It is a sign of humility, an act of hospitality, but above all an act of demonstrating Jesus'

consistent love for his friends for whom he will lay down his life in less than twenty-four hours. He gives his disciples – which includes all of us – the mandate to follow his example and serve one another with humility, hospitality, and love, holding nothing back. We are to love one another as Jesus did, to the very end.

There is another implication of this action for the community of faith, for the Church. All who gather around the Lord's table – reliving the mystery memorial of the Last Supper -- are equal in God's eyes and should be in our eyes. In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul points out that there should be no distinctions of rich or poor around God's table. All of us are to be treated equally: male and female, young and old, educated and uneducated, citizen and undocumented. All of us disciples of the Lord are to live in unity, harmony, and communion with each other and with God.

Jesus shares his Body with his disciples at the Last Supper – the same body that will be crucified the next day. He shares his Precious Blood, the same blood that will darken the ground in the Garden, be spattered in the whipping, and flow from his crown of thorns and his nailed hands and feet. All of the paschal mystery which we celebrate during this Triduum bespeaks God's infinite, compassionate, healing, merciful, unconditional, and enduring love for all of us – without exception! May the

Eucharist strengthen us for our pilgrim journey as we serve one another, especially the most vulnerable among us – with humility, hospitality, and love. “As I have done for you, you also should do!”

Our Lady was with the disciples in the Upper Room until the time of Pentecost. Our Lady of Guadalupe is with us here and now, as she promised us through Saint Juan Diego. Let us allow her to embrace us with her maternal love and draw us closer to her beloved Son.