

## **HOMILY: HOLY THURSDAY 2019**

We call today 'Holy Thursday' or 'Maundy Thursday'. It is 'Maundy Thursday' because today we celebrate Christ's gift to us of his 'New Commandment' – his new 'Mandatum' – 'Love one another, as I have loved you'. But it is not simply for the 'New Commandment' of Love that we offer thanks today. Rather, what we rejoice to celebrate today is nothing less than a mighty New Act of Creation – a New Act of Creation, which illuminates Christ's New Commandment and empowers us to carry it out. Today, Christ 'spoke and it was done'. In anticipation of his death, he uttered over the bread and wine divine words that would inaugurate his New Creation: 'This is my Body...this is my Blood' And as he gave himself in either kind to his disciples, he formed out of that strangely assorted band the New Creation, his Body, the Church.

'Love' and 'Creation' are inseparably bound together. The New Commandment of Love and this Supper that 'recreates and enkindles love' interpret one another: the one unceasingly gives meaning to the other. For it was by loving his own as he did – loving them unto the end – that Christ brought about his New Creation. As St Paul proclaimed in his Letter to the Church at Corinth: 'without love, I AM nothing'. Without love, there is mere 'waste and void'. Or, to put it positively, in the words of St John of the Cross, 'where there is no love, put love and you will find love'. That is the way Christ loved his own – forming his new Creation out of love – and that is how we are to love and carry forward Christ's work, so that love may be there, where it was not before.

And we can do this, because in the Supper Christ makes us fellow-creators with himself. At his Word, the bread and wine are changed; and we who share them 'become what we receive' – we become fellow creators with Christ – empowered by him to put love where there is no love. But this work of 'creating love' has to follow the pattern Christ has set. It has to be done by the love that washes the feet of others; not in any spirit of servility, but in the spirit of humble reverence. The divine Creator has a profound respect for all he touches. Christ lays aside his garment and girds himself with a towel, in profound humility before his disciples. And it must be the same for us, as we obey his call to share, as fellow-creators, in his creative work of love.

The miracle of creation absolutely requires both love and humility. And it requires, equally, readiness to suffer. The 'night' of Calvary overshadows the liturgy we are now celebrating. Suffering cannot be by-passed. The true Creator has to take the risk of failing. Judas must depart, 'to do what he has to do'. And there is pain too, because Christ knows he will soon be separated from the Body of his friends. The pain of separation is always there as part of the work of creation – it is a truth that parents know only too well: as the child grows to be an adult and properly finds his or her own independent life. So too, for all of us, who are called to share in and advance the work of Christ's New Creation of Love, pain and suffering cannot be by-passed. The Host is broken and the Wine of Life poured out – and as fellow-creators with Christ, we have to share in the night Christ endured – this too is part of the mystery of our becoming what we receive.

At this Mass, at this Supper that 'recreates and enkindles love', we are ourselves caught up in Christ's New Work of Creation. We know here the darkness of the night that has to precede creation – but here too we receive the foretaste of the life that is love. And so may Christ the Living Bread love us – his Church and each one of us individually – into life, so that we may day by day bring forth love, 'as he has loved us'.