



## HOMILY OF MGR NOËL SIMARD FOR HOLY THURSDAY 9 APRIL 2020

"You must wash one another's feet ... as I have done for you" (John 13:15).

In the Gospel we have just heard, St. John does not recount the institution of the Eucharist but rather the washing of the feet, a gesture that takes place not at the beginning but during the meal that Jesus shares with his apostles. It is in the continuation of the washing of the feet that Jesus took bread, pronounced the blessing and said: "Take and eat of it, this is my body given up for you". Just as the meal of Israel, mentioned in the first reading, preceded the Passover, that miraculous passage from the Red Sea, that passage from bondage to freedom, the Lord instituted the Eucharistic meal which also precedes the Lord's Passover, that is, his passage from death to the glory of his Father. He shares his Body and Blood, which are the first fruits of his supreme act of love, namely, the gift of his life on the cross.

In renewing this gesture tonight, we are not only remembering but letting it happen here and now as a living memory, a real presence. And it is the Holy Spirit who comes to fully realize this presence of Christ in our midst, on the altar and in all of us. We make this gesture not to mimic the Lord but to allow ourselves to be imbued with Him. In fact, by giving Himself to us as food and drink, Jesus communicates to us His life offered out of love. The Eucharist, this divine bread, comes to appease our hunger for God and to strengthen our journey to Christ. Tonight, let us give thanks to God for the gift of the Eucharist, for the gift of the ministerial priesthood, for the sacraments and for the Church. Let us welcome with joy his invitation to make of our lives, ones transformed and animated by his love.

At his last meal with his friends, Jesus removes his outer garment, kneels down and washes the feet of the apostles. By leaving his garment, Jesus already announces the stripping of his clothes before the crucifixion, the stripping of his body of flesh before his resurrection in his body of glory. By kneeling down and washing the feet of the apostles, a gesture which was the duty of the house servant, Jesus upsets our concepts of service and authority. He, the paschal Lamb who sets himself on fire, is also the loving shepherd who cares for our bodies and souls. To disciples who are constantly called to order, because they covet first place, Jesus reminds us of the role of true authority which is service. By this gesture lived in love and humility, Jesus disqualifies, for the centuries to come, "any behaviour of the Church which is not that of a servant Church...any behaviour of a bishop or a priest who would forget their mission of service, any behaviour of a deacon who would not be the sign of Christ the Servant par excellence", any behaviour of a Christian who would be content with fine words without taking action. Jesus thus reminds us that in order to follow Him and advance towards the eternal Kingdom of his Father, we need these two pillars of love and humility.

Our Church has no other evangelical identity than the service she must humbly render to humanity, recognizing that great sacred reality that is the face of every human being, especially when disfigured, suffering or unknown. The only reason for being Christian is to serve out of love and to give one's life daily and constantly. And for this we must draw from the very life of Jesus, from his Word, from his bread of life. In order to be able to wash the feet of others, we must allow ourselves to be washed by Jesus, to listen to Him, to look at Him, to let Him transform us as we sit at His table. If we walk with Jesus on the path of His passion, if we become brothers and sisters at the service of one another in true mutual love, if we too get

down on our knees to alleviate human suffering and misery, then we are witnessing the Essence of a love that is experienced and proven.

Even today, Jesus joins us in a wounded humanity, a humanity struck by a scourge that is overturning our way of life, our society, our world, our Church. Even today, Jesus comes to our rescue as our world faces the threat of death hanging in the air, as we live in the insecurity and isolation needed to prevent the spread of the epidemic. Yes, how difficult is this isolation which upsets our relationship with others, our need to be close, to touch, to show our affection with hugs and handshakes. It is as if we have entered into a universal Lent or a planetary fast. And as Catholics, we also live the Eucharistic fast imposed by the closure of churches and the cancellation of liturgical celebrations, but which gives us the opportunity to deepen our desire for the gift of the Mass. We can ask ourselves where God is in these very difficult times.

God has always taken care of his people, of his children. He is faithful to his promise to be always with us and for us. He continues to make Himself present to us by His Word which is light and food, by the prayer that allows us to bring our sorrows and joys to Him, by the spiritual communion made possible by the broadcasting of many Masses here in Quebec, in the world or from the private chapel of Pope Francis. God continues to kneel and serve through all those who devote themselves and give their lives to the patients with COVID-19; He continues to care for us through all those who ensure essential services and meet our food, health and social needs. We can give thanks to God for the social networks and modern means of communication that do not replace physical closeness but allow another way of expressing our care and love for our brothers and sisters in humanity.

We are called to live differently, to appreciate the simple things in life, to be close to others in a different way, taking a compassionate and kind look at them. The virus affects our social and economic life enormously. It forces us or will force us to build our world more on the common good and solidarity, a solidarity that requires us to show as much care and concern for the vulnerable and needy as we do for the strong and powerful.

Let us keep hope and look to the future with confidence because the coronavirus will pass and from this ordeal will emerge something contagious for good, something beneficial for the whole of humanity and our earth, something positive for our Church called to be ever more the Servant of God and of the world.

May the bread of the Word of God and the Eucharistic bread be our strength and support on the road and keep us in service. AMEN