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MAUNDY THURSDAY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, March 28th, 2024)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE HOURS WE ARE LIVING to the rhythm of liturgy place us before two radically opposed universes. That of hatred, and that of Love.

There is the world, along with what is lowest and vilest in it. The world that ruthlessly hounds the Innocent One, and arbitrarily decides who is to live, and who is to die: Jesus or Barabbas.

At the heart of this world, and as beyond the walls of the High Room the plot to kill Him is being hatched, Jesus gathers His disciples and bequeaths them a living Testament, the fairest of all inheritances: His body and blood. He encases this inheritance into a precious setting, the Passover Supper, and the long discourse with which it is concluded. Let us live again these moments.

Jesus first sends Peter and John: “Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it.”^a They answer: “Where wilt thou that we prepare?” Jesus tells them to follow a man carrying a pitcher of water. They are to enter into the house into which he himself will enter, and to tell the householder, “The master saith to thee: Where is the guest chamber, where I may eat the passover with My disciples?”^b

a. Lk 22:8.

b. v. 11.

How could we fail to remember Cana, at the beginning of the Lord’s public life? There, the water in the jars had been

changed into wine. The hour has now come when what Jesus' first sign announced is to be fulfilled. The bridegroom and the bride of this wedding of a new kind are Christ and the Church, Christ and mankind. The hour has now come when the Lord is going to seal a new covenant between God and man by offering His body and blood, by offering Himself as the true Paschal victim.

a. *Lk 22:16-18.* This Passover is the last one Jesus will eat with His disciples, as He tells them: "From this time I will not eat it, till it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. [...] I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, till the kingdom of God come."^a Christ accomplishes His Passover, which is eventually fulfilled by the coming of the kingdom of God on this earth. From now on, each man will be able to enter into communion with the Lord's Passover, to be baptised in His blood, to be fed with His body and blood. In this covenant God forgives, namely, He goes beyond our sins and reconciles us with Him. We shall sing on Easter day, "*Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus.* — Christ our Passover has been sacrificed."^b

b. *I Co 5:7.*

Regardless of this solemn context, the disciples gathered around the Lord squabble about who is the greatest among them. Such is man's heart. Very likely, it is at this moment that the Lord carried out for each of them the significant gesture of the washing of the feet. A harsh lesson for each of them. This gesture, however, appears as an indispensable step towards communion to the body and blood of the Lord.

St. Paul echoes this teaching when he tells his Corinthians, in the verses preceding the epistle we have just heard and the narrative of the Institution:

c. *I Co 1:18-19.* For first of all I hear that when you come together in the church, there are schisms among you. And in part I believe it. For there must be also heresies: that they also, who are approved may be made manifest among you.^c

d. *Ibid., v. 24-25.* Receiving communion means wishing to live of God's life, and living of God's life entails living in a way that is consistent with God's teachings, Who in Christ made Himself a servant and offered His own life for His friends. "Do this in remembrance of me."^d

The institution of the sacraments of the Eucharist and the order is completed by a long discourse reported by St. John. Let us especially note in these teachings the fact that belonging to the Church takes place in a communion with Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches. Christ cannot be divided against Himself. In Him, we are, and we must be, one. Let us listen to this call to promote unity inside the Church, through our deeds and words.

After this unique moment of intimacy, it is high time to go to the Mount of Olives. Very soon, Judas arrives with a troop. The disciples scatter. What will remain from Jesus' testament?

What will it mean for us also, tonight? What does it mean, each time we receive Christ's body and blood? Do we abide in God? Does God abide in us? Are we one in Christ, the servants of His love?

Dom Delatte, the third abbot of Solesmes, wrote:

The transubstantiation that is carried out on the altar in the hands of each priest, in our hands, puts the Lord within everyone's reach. Still, we have to point out that the marvellous conversion carried out on the altar is but a means for the Lord. This conversion is ordered to another transubstantiation, one which is final: "*Sicut misit me vivens Pater, et ego vivo propter Patrem : et qui manducat me, et ipse vivet propter me.* — As the living Father hath sent Me and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.^a The Lord comes into us exclusively to change us into Him. He who is Act^b cannot be a mere witness and spectator. His design is to orientate and govern Himself our lives and activities, to transform us into Him spiritually, and to transubstantiate us in our turn. This conversion is ordered to another transubstantiation, one which is final: "*Qui adhæret Domino unus spiritus est.* — But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit^c."¹

a. *Jn* 6:57.

b. Namely, God.

c. *I Co* 6:17.

Yet, this spiritual transformation into God, this life of God that wants to come into us, cannot be realised without us. During these holy days, as the Lord is going to rest in the tabernacle, wanting us to keep watch by His side, to unite ourselves to His agony, most especially during this night, let us make a little

1. DOM DELATTE, *Notes sur la vie spirituelle*, ch. 3, VII.2, § 181.

time for God. Let us remember the exhortation of St. Anselm Pope Francis quoted in his Ash Wednesday homily:

O weak man, escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Cast away your burdensome troubles and postpone your tasks and labours. Make a little time for God and rest a while in Him. Enter into your mind's inner chamber. Shut out everything but God, and whatever helps you to seek Him; and when you have shut the door, seek Him. Speak now, O my heart, speak to God and say: I seek Thy face; Thy face, O Lord, I desire. ^a

*a. Prosligion, n. 1
(PL 158, 225 B-C).*

During these hours that separate us from the great Paschal Vigil, let us receive the new commandment as a compass for our lives. Let us receive, in a renewed communion to the Lord's body and blood, the strength to carry it out: "As I have loved you, you also love one another." ^b

b. Jn 13:34.

Amen.

