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Holy Thursday: The Institution of the Eucharist

The Prelate's Holy Thursday Reflections, broadcast on EWTN world radio

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The content of the Holy Thursday liturgy is so rich. This is the great day of the institution of Holy Eucharist, heaven's gift to mankind; the day of the institution of the Priesthood, another divine gift that brings the Sacrifice of Calvary into all times and

places, really and truly present, so that we can make its fruits our own.

The moment is drawing near when Jesus will offer his life for mankind. So great was his love that in his infinite Wisdom He found a way to go away and stay here at the same time. When St. Josemaría Escrivá observed that some people are obliged to leave their homes and families in order to find work elsewhere, he commented: “Human love has found a symbol. Those who go away leave behind in their place a reminder, perhaps a photo. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man, doesn’t leave a symbol, but a reality: He himself stays. He will go to the Father, but He will also remain with men. Under the species of bread and wine, He is really present—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.”

How do we correspond to such immense love? By assisting with faith

and devotion at Holy Mass, the living and present memorial of the Sacrifice of Calvary. By preparing very well to receive Him in Holy Communion with our souls very clean. By frequently visiting Jesus hidden in the Tabernacle.

In the first reading of the Mass, we are reminded of what God established in the Old Testament so that the people of Israel would not forget the benefits they had received from Him. The text goes into great detail: from how the paschal lamb was to be prepared to the careful way of recalling the passing of the Lord. If all that was prescribed to commemorate events which only prefigured our liberation from sin as Jesus Christ obtained it, how much more carefully ought we to conduct ourselves now that we have truly been redeemed from enslavement to sin and made children of God!

This is why the Church inculcates in us great refinement in caring for everything that refers to the Eucharist. Do we assist at the Holy Sacrifice every Sunday and holy day of obligation, knowing that we are taking part in a divine action?

St. John relates that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper. We have to be clean, body and soul, to receive Him worthily. This is why He left us the Sacrament of Penance.

Today we also commemorate the institution of the Priesthood. It is a good moment to pray for the Pope, for bishops, and for priests, and to ask for many vocations throughout the world. We'll pray better the closer we are to this Jesus of ours who instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood. Let us tell him with complete sincerity what St. Josemaria often said to Him: "Lord,

place in my heart the love with which you want me to love you.”

In today's events the Virgin Mary is not physically present, although she was in Jerusalem those days.

Tomorrow we shall find her at the foot of the Cross. But today, discretely and quietly she accompanies her Son very closely, in a profound union of prayer, sacrifice, and self-giving.

John Paul II indicates that after the Ascension of Our Lord into Heaven, Mary would participate assiduously in the Eucharistic celebrations of the first Christians. The Pope adds: “The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 56).

Now, too, the Virgin Mary accompanies Christ in all the world's Tabernacles. We ask her to teach us to be Eucharistic souls, men and women of certain faith and strong piety who make the effort not to leave Jesus alone. May we know how to adore Him, beg his pardon, thank Him for his blessings, and keep Him company.

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