



**2016 Holy Thursday  
Homily**

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There is nothing more important for us as Christians, and as those who live out our faith in the Catholic tradition, than to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. To be a Christian is to be a disciple, a follower, of Jesus and it is hard to follow someone whom we do not know, or really care a great deal about, or believe in with trusting faith. We must know Him if we are to follow Him.

At the Last Supper, which we commemorate tonight, as we do, in fact, every time we celebrate the Mass, Jesus described Himself as the Way, as the Truth, and as the Life. Such a description is a challenge for us, as it was for His first disciples, because it invites each of us to ask ourselves some difficult questions. Is Jesus, and the path He treads, and the example He gives, really the Way for me? Is His teaching, both about God and about what it means to live a fully human life, really the Truth which I have welcomed into my life as the principle which guides everything I say and do? Is He really my life, the one who fills my heart with joy, who lifts me up when I fall, who forgives me when I fail? Am I allowing Him to be the friend to me that He seeks to be? Or have I perhaps, at least sometimes, pushed Him to the margins of my life, fearful that He might ask more of me than I am ready or able to give?

As the world in which I live seems to pull me with ever greater force in one direction, how honestly can I say that I am indeed a disciple of this man who keeps challenging and questioning the values I encounter all around me, and even find already deeply planted within me?

These questions could well have been in the minds of the first disciples as they sat at table with Jesus at the Last Supper and listened to Him talk about His body being broken and His blood being poured out for them. How frightening it must have been for them to hear Him speak of His impending arrest. How confusing it must have been when He talked about leaving them, about going to a place they could not go, about the mysterious gift of the Holy Spirit. How difficult it must have been for them to hear Him speak to them of His gift of peace when all they could see was the threat of violence, of loss and of failure. And how puzzling it must have been when He, whom they called master, and Lord, got down on His hands and knees and performed the lowly and humiliating task of washing their dusty feet.

What a strange thing it is to decide to follow such a man, to commit yourself to being a disciple of such a puzzling person, to allow yourself to be guided by the teachings, and the values, and even more by the example, of someone who constantly challenges you to be more, and to do more, and to give more. Is this really a recipe for peace, as Jesus claims it to be, or is it, rather, a recipe for discontent and uncertainty and even discouragement, when nothing we do seems to be quite enough – when we are always asked for more?



The first disciples, of course, struggled no less than many of us do. Peter was horrified when Jesus wanted to wash His feet. He was overcome with fear, on this same night that He ate his last meal with Jesus, when he was a little later, after the arrest of Jesus, challenged about his friendship with Him. Judas, who must never have been able to really understand this man who so fascinated him but whom he ultimately betrayed, did so for thirty pieces of silver. All the other disciples, apart from one, John, failed Jesus in His hour of greatest need, firstly by sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was engulfed by suffering and fear, and then, when Jesus was arrested, by running away in terror, leaving Jesus alone to face His fate.

The failure of these disciples, the men personally and specially chosen by Jesus to be His closest companions and the foundation of His Church, is paralleled in our own day by our own failures as disciples. We, too, often desert Jesus, in the sense that we exclude Him from our lives. We, too, ignore His suffering in the sense that we do not recognise Him in the faces of those who suffer neglect, or abuse, or rejection. We, too, like Peter, might say that we will always be faithful, that we will never deny or abandon Him, that we will even give our lives for Him, only then to abandon Him when it all becomes too hard. But, just as it was for Peter, and for the other disciples, so it is and will always be for us. We may fail Jesus, but He will never fail us. We may walk away from Him, but He will never turn His back on us. He will be ready with open arms to welcome us, as the loving father was ready to welcome his prodigal son. He will lift us when we are sinking, just as He lifted Peter from the stormy waves and brought him to safety. He will come to meet us in our despair and discouragement, just as He met the two disciples who were escaping from Jerusalem to Emmaus after the crucifixion, convinced that Jesus had failed them and that all their hopes and dreams had been destroyed.

We might sum it up by saying that Jesus will always be present to us, even when we seek to be absent from Him. That burning desire of Jesus to be present to us, and with us, and within us, is crystallised in the gift of the Eucharist, instituted on this night, the last night of His life on earth before His suffering and death.

By giving Himself to us in the Eucharist, under the appearances of bread and wine, He reveals His deep passion to be one with us in a profound relationship of life and love. *"Make your home in me,"* He says, *"as I make my home in you"*. Let us become so completely one that I can truly be your Way, and your Truth and your Life. Tonight, when the priest or minister holds the consecrated host before you and says, *"The Body of Christ"*, and when, as the chalice is held out to you, you hear the words, *"The Blood of Christ"*, let your *"Amen"* be an act of deep faith in His Eucharistic presence, a sincere sign of your determination to truly be His disciple, and a gesture of deep gratitude for the love which leads Him to give Himself to us, on the Cross, in the Eucharist, and in the daily journey of our lives.