

Maundy Thursday 2020

Saints Next Door

The commandment of love. The institution of the Eucharist.

The Gift of Priesthood.

Tonight, is full of ironies, but a better word might be, full of sacrifices. I want to preach about service, but I cannot demonstrate this by washing feet. We celebrate the Institution of the Eucharist, by making our Spiritual Communion. We commemorate the Institution of the Priesthood, by celebrating Mass in an empty Church.

Charity, derives from the Latin *Caritas* = loving kindness. In an act of charity, of loving kindness, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as a model of service, for them and us to follow, for all time. In these strange days, we see this model lived out on a daily basis in our Hospitals and wherever we encounter an essential worker. No more should we say **what** is essential work? Rather, **who** is an essential worker? It is about the person, not only the role. Pope Francis, with characteristic vision calls them '*saints next door*'.

I'm thinking at this time of the saints who live next door. They are heroes: doctors, volunteers, religious sisters, priests, shop workers – all performing their duty so that society can continue functioning. How many doctors and nurses have died! How many religious sisters have died! All serving ... "The Lord does not leave his miracles half-finished." If we become aware of this miracle of the next-door saints, if we can follow their tracks, the miracle will end well, for the good of all. God doesn't leave things halfway. We are the ones who do that.

Our saints next door, certainly model the charity – the loving kindness which Jesus left as an example to follow.

Jesus has also given us the gift of the Eucharist. Tonight, we celebrate the Institution of the Eucharist, and yet there may be a sadness that we cannot receive. However, the Eucharist is given to us, to strengthen our communion in the Lord. That is why we call it Holy Communion. We are in communion, with Francis our Pope, Bernard our Bishop and with one another – expressly through the celebration of the Eucharist. It is this that makes us Roman Catholics. Our act of Spiritual Communion serves to express our longing for this communion with the Lord. It will strengthen this union in the Lord and with each other.

It is part of the charity or loving kindness of Jesus. We may undertake a Eucharistic fast, but we never fast from charity and kindness. We gather from so many different places around the world, and the country, and the parish, but we are one. We are united around the table of the Lord; worshipping together in 'spirit and in truth'.

I would invite you to express that union and longing later, by spending a few moments watching before the Tabernacle. Unite yourself with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is a service of Watching in prayer at Home that my friend, Fr Peter has written, which you may find helpful – it is on the website.

Our Communion is a model of the charity – the loving kindness which Jesus left as an example to follow.

We commemorate the Institution of the Priesthood, by celebrating Mass in an empty Church.

What is a shepherd without any sheep? Answer: Furloughed?

A shepherd without sheep is just a hygienically challenged man walking the countryside with a stick in his hands.

I'm sure you are shouting at the computer – You haven't lost your sheep; we're here! As so many of you have kindly told me, in your emails, letters and texts.

Your messages from so many places have been so heartening, and encouraging, and I might add that I have found other sheep who are not of this flock, and these I lead as well. I look forward to getting to know you better.

There are lots of things I cannot do at this time – such as Baptisms and Weddings which have been booked which is saddening. In fact, there are only four things I have done:

- Celebrate Mass
- Conduct Funerals
- Preach the Gospel
- Pray

These are my essential workings. It has been a great privilege to have the extra time to try and do these to the best of my ability.

It is at the altar where my 'essential workings' are united. The altar evokes both the sacrifice of the Mass, and the memory of the Lord's commandment of love. It is where, the Lord's loving kindness in washing the feet of his disciples and his sacrifice of the Cross a few hours later are commemorated. Priesthood and Service are one, because they are rooted in the understanding and example of Christ as Servant and High Priest.

Sometimes, it is only when you suffer loss, that you understand just how as precious it is. We seek to enter fully into the mystery of our loss, of the Lord's death and resurrection. That we might appreciate even more the gifts he bestowed upon us, the Commandment of love, the Eucharist and the Sacred Priesthood.

In short, let us seek to be the *Saints Next door*, modelling the charity – the loving kindness which Jesus left as an example to follow.