

Mass of the Lord's Supper begins Easter Triduum

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WASHINGTON, DC - Marking the end of Lent, and opening the three-day observance of the Triduum, which ultimately leads to the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord on Easter Sunday, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, apostolic administrator of Washington celebrated the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Thursday evening at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. Holy Thursday commemorates Jesus' final meal with his apostles before his death, when he instituted the priesthood and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Cardinal Wuerl began his homily by calling to mind the great monuments in Washington, D.C., which stand as witness to our nation's history. He included the faith memorials, such as the Cathedral of St. Matthew and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which also serve as a reminder of our faith history.

"The Church calls us today to recognize our great Christian memorial," he said.

The readings of the liturgy recall two great memorials from the Old and New Testaments – God establishing through Moses the Passover for the Hebrews (Ex. 12:1-8, 11-14), and the institution of the Eucharist, the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

"But it is here... that we see the great and abiding difference between this memorial and any other, certainly this memorial and the covenant with Israel," he said. "This sacred meal is not just the... retelling of the story of God's love, a love for each one of us individually... The Eucharist that we are about to celebrate continues this invitation to you and to me personally, intimately, to enter that transforming love of God."

This celebration of the Lord's Supper supersedes other mere memorials by actually making present the action of Jesus' suffering and death, the cardinal said.

"We're not participating in something we look at from a distance," he said. "We're invited into the very reality of Christ's death and resurrection so that we're caught up in that and experience redemption."

Love for God gained through the sacrifice of the Eucharist then translates into love and service of others, as exhibited in the washing of the feet, the cardinal said.

"Be a font of that love, so that God's love can fill the world," he said as he concluded.

After the homily, Cardinal Wuerl washed the feet of twelve individuals in memory of Jesus' act of humility and service when he washed the feet of his apostles. The twelve chosen by the cathedral reflected the diversity of the archdiocese and St. Matthew's Cathedral parish.

As the Mass concluded, the Eucharist was moved in a solemn procession to a side chapel to the altar of repose for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where the faithful were able to spend time in quiet prayer and reflection. On Holy Thursday, the altar and sanctuary are stripped of all ornamentation – crucifixes and flowers are removed, candles and lamps are extinguished, and holy water fonts were emptied as a reflection of the emptiness of the world without Christ on Good Friday when he died on the cross.

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