

United in the Last Supper

We are drawing close to Holy Week, and our thoughts go more readily to our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection: central moments in mankind's history that illumine our faith and our life.

From Rome, it is easy to travel in prayer to every country, to each center, to each of your homes, especially where people now have to live in a time of stricter confinement due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Our thoughts and prayers go out especially to all the sick and to those who are caring for them. We can accompany our Lord now in his Passion from a hospital bed or from our homes. The Cross is a mystery, but if we embrace it like Christ and with Christ, it is light and strength for each of us, which we can pass on to others.

We are all hoping and praying patiently that this pandemic will end. In these circumstances it is especially helpful to renew our faith in God's love for us, and to respond to that love by being of service to the others.

As I recently reminded you in a letter, the Communion of Saints leads us to make our own everything that affects other people, because we can truly say, with words of Saint Paul: "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (*1 Cor* 12:26). Lord, and Mary our Mother, help us to do so.

Last Sunday, the Pope said that "we want to respond to the pandemic with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness. Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness to people who are the loneliest felt as well as to those who are undergoing a very tough time." Let us pray for those who have contracted the virus. Let us also pray that the social and economic consequences of this crisis may be as small as possible. Let us be mindful of so many families that are worried about their future, of so many workers who are anxious, of so many business owners who are fearful. We will need unity, hope, generosity and sacrifice.

At the Last Supper, our Lord told us: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." With this confidence, we are preparing ourselves for the Easter Triduum, which in many countries this year will be celebrated in empty churches, but which will be filled by the faithful with their minds and hearts as they follow the services through the means of communication. Our Lord has triumphed,

so nothing should discourage us; indeed, his victory encourages us to renew our struggle with hope.

As we approach Holy Thursday, where we will celebrate the institution of the Eucharist, it is moving to read in Saint's John's Gospel: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (*Jn* 13:1).

Let us go in our imagination to the Cenacle at Jerusalem to contemplate our Lord's great demonstration of love for us.

Our God is always near. But in the Eucharist He gives Himself to us with his Body, his Blood, his Soul, and his Divinity. No one is excluded from this love. Jesus has loved us "to the end."

In his love to the end, our Lord wanted to take upon himself the sins of all humanity, to restore us to friendship with God the Father.

On Holy Thursday we will remember the moment when our Lord instituted the Eucharist, the sacramental sacrifice of our redemption. It is a day on which traditionally so many Christians manifest in many ways their adoration and love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

However, this year's Holy Thursday has a different tone. All of us would like to take part in the vigil before the Blessed Sacrament... Above all, those of you who have not been able to receive our Lord in the Eucharist for some time now, try to make your spiritual Communion with the certainty that our Lord is with you.

We are facing a unique opportunity to grow, in a new way and with God's help, in love for Jesus in the Eucharist and for the Mass.

Jesus: we want to remember and thank You for each one of the times we have received You in Communion. Even though we always have You close by, realizing the absence of Your sacramental presence will help us to increase our desire to receive You again when it becomes possible.

Saint Josemaría taught thousands of people this prayer, which he learned from a Piarist priest: "I wish, my Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervor of the saints."

Praying this prayer with affection can be a good preparation for Holy Thursday: “I wish, my Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervor of the saints.”

Participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice is not only the remembrance of something in the past; the Mass is the sacramental renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, our Lord’s self-giving for us anticipated at the Last Supper. “Do this in memory of me” (*Lk 22:19*).

Saint John Paul II wrote that the sacrifice of the Cross “is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after He had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there.”

The Church makes Christ’s Passion and Death sacramentally present in every Eucharistic celebration. No Mass is “private.” Every Mass is “universal,” because each Mass is Christ acting, and with Him, his Body which is the Church. And the Church is each of the baptized: each one of us.

Therefore, faced with the impossibility of attending Mass at this time, be assured that in every Eucharistic celebrated by priests without people attending, we are all present. As Saint Josemaría said, “When I celebrate Mass with just one person to serve it, the people are present also. I feel that there, with me, are all Catholics, all believers, and also all those who do not believe. All God’s creatures are there—the earth and the sea and the sky, and the animals and plants—the whole of creation giving glory to the Lord.”¹

Trust greatly in the strength that continues to reach us all through the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, including those of you who cannot be present. We priests want to bring to each Mass all our brothers and sisters, all our relatives and friends, the whole Church, all humanity, and in a very special way the sick and those who are alone.

Thank you, Lord, for the Eucharist, for the Mass. We think again of the image of the Holy Father blessing mankind with the monstrance in his hands, looking out over the colonnade of Saint Peter’s Square. Thank you, Lord, for the Eucharist. And thank you for the priesthood, which has perpetuated your Love over time. Let us pray a lot for priests.

¹ Saint Josemaría, Homily “A Priest Forever,” in *In Love with the Church*.