

HOLY THURSDAY

Tonight we begin a Liturgy that will last three whole days, a 'Triduum.' Tonight's Mass resumes tomorrow afternoon with the Good Friday Liturgy of the Passion, and finishes on Saturday night with the Easter Vigil. This is why tonight's Mass began with the Sign of the Cross but as you'll notice, there's no blessing or conclusion. Tomorrow's liturgy has no Introductory Rite and at the end just a simple prayer. It's only the Easter Vigil that will end in the usual way with a blessing and dismissal. The Triduum is one celebration: the liturgy of the Passover, the Passing-Over of Our Lord Jesus Christ, his passage from this world to the Father, from death to life, from earth to heaven. Indeed, these three days are the most important three days in human history: Good Friday when the Lord laid down his life for us, Holy Saturday when he descended into hell, and Easter Sunday, when in the flesh he rose from the grave. By his Passing-Over, Jesus has totally transformed human living and made that gift of new life available to us in his Church. So tonight we begin that Passover in this Mass of the Lord's Supper, when we join Peter and the Apostles in the Upper Room for the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and the priesthood that serves it. We also learn what it means to be a priest and indeed a disciple, as God the Son takes the form of a servant and washes our feet.

THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS FOR YOU; THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD. Nowadays many Catholics want their children baptised but sadly, as they put it, they never come to church. I don't like the phrase 'coming to church;' I always try gently to correct it: What you mean is, you don't come to Mass. --Because coming to Mass is about far more than coming to church. The Mass is everything. In every Mass, the Father speaks his Word and feeds us with the Food of Immortality. In every Mass, the Son offers himself up for us, laying down his life in service, that we might go and do the same. In every Mass, the Holy Spirit divinises us with the life of the Blessed Trinity, uniting us with the angels, saints and faithful departed, and with the whole Church of every time and place. In a secular culture, coming to Mass has a huge significance. As Catholics, it defines who we are. It is the chief means by which we publicly witness to our faith. Indeed, it is key to the new evangelisation for through the Mass, we leaven the world. This is why as a diocese, we need to tackle the decline in practice, to develop new forms of catechesis, to revise our baptismal and sacramental policies, and to ensure our schools and parishes are more closely integrated.

I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU MAY COPY WHAT I HAVE DONE. In the new English translation of the Mass, I like the new forms of the Dismissal: GO AND ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD; GO IN PEACE GLORIFYING THE LORD BY YOUR LIFE. The love we celebrate here must be taken out and put into practice in our lives. The Washing of Feet tonight is the most poignant sign of this. God really does love us! God really does want things to work out well! God really has come among us, to

serve us not to be served! That must be our attitude too: not to laud it over others, nor to walk by, but to love and to serve, to care and to help, especially those in need. So as we come to this wonderful Mass tonight, let us turn to the Heart of Jesus, Tabernacle of the Most High. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will touch the hearts of those who do not usually come to Mass. And let us pray for ourselves, that we will love Mass and persevere in practice all the days of our life.