

## Holy Thursday 2010      Homily

In a book entitled *Healing through the Mass* Fr. Robert De Grandis recounts that NASA, the American Space Agency, did some experimenting with a special type of camera that could see energy levels in the human body. The camera image is displayed on a computer monitor.

Electrical energy shows up as a colourful glow around a person's body. NASA's interest in the experiment was to investigate the effects of space travel on astronauts in orbit.

Experimenting in a hospital they discovered that when a person is dying the glow of energy around the body is thinner and it gets thinner and thinner until the person dies. The scientists carrying out this investigation in the hospital were behind a two-way mirror watching a particular patient. The monitor recorded another man coming into the room with light coming from his pocket. When the man took the object from his pocket the camera showed the whole room was filled with light. The light was so bright that the monitor could no longer display what was happening.

They ran to the room to see what was causing so much light to appear in their camera. They discovered that the dying man was being given Holy Communion. Afterwards the monitor showed that the light around the patient was noticeably brighter.

Although in his fifties, after witnessing that event, the scientist conducting the experiment decided to become a priest.

Today we thank Jesus for giving us two sacraments during the Last Supper, the sacraments of the Eucharist and

the priesthood. Both the Eucharist and the priesthood “were born” during the Last Supper.

A few years back, Pope John Paul II in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday wrote:

“At the Last Supper we were born as priests. We were born from the Eucharist. If we can truly say that the whole Church lives from the Eucharist...we can say the same thing about the priesthood: it is born, it lives, it works and bears fruit “*from the Eucharist.*” There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”

This evening we celebrate first and foremost the institution of the Eucharist.

Here Christ has given the world a constant reminder of his presence, but also a link with those events when the barrier that separated heaven from earth was torn down.

In the mass we are united with Jesus in a most powerful way; his death and resurrection are made present as he shares his body and blood with us in the most intimate communion the human heart can ever know.

On that night Jesus took the bread, blessed it and said: This is my body which will be given up for you, do this in memory of me. We believe that every time we repeat this action in the celebration of the mass the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Our Lord.

This understanding of the Eucharist is not accepted by all Christians. But we Catholics remain firm in our faith that this bread and this wine through the action of Christ and his Church really do become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

This food for our bodies becomes food for our souls—this tiny host and this sip of wine could never satisfy our physical hunger but they bring our souls more nourishment than we can possibly imagine.

The Eucharist is the deepest communion that we could possibly experience with God. We celebrate it here in church day-in-day-out and if we can see with the eyes of faith and approach it with trusting hearts it can never grow stale, we can never be bored—in fact what grows in us is an ever-greater hunger for union with God.

This deep and powerful connection with Our Lord in the mass helps us to keep true to everything he taught us. It helps us to remember our dignity and choose to rise above all that would rob us of our heritage as sons and daughters of God. It helps us to keep faith and be true to him and to constantly rededicate our lives as his faithful followers.

And we who are Priests hold the Eucharist especially close to our hearts because it is our privilege and duty to preside at it day by day, week by week. And we have the honor of distributing the Eucharist to those who approach to receive the Lord.

At the Last Supper, Jesus showed his disciples how to exercise their ministry. He put on an apron and went around and washed their feet. In this way he provides us with the model for all Christian ministry and shows us that the greatest among us is the one who is willing to serve.

Imperfect as our lives might be, we Priests are not afraid to follow his example because by doing so we are sure that we will learn to become more like him.

Getting down on our knees before others and performing this most humble task as Our Lord did will surely do us good.

Humbly baring our feet and letting someone else wash them will also unite us with Christ just as it did for the Apostles in the Upper Room.

Witnessing our brothers and sisters in the Christian community literally following Christ's command will draw us in to this greatest of all mysteries.

Whichever our role is, tonight in this mass we take to ourselves more deeply Christ's command to love one another. We learn from him, the greatest of all teachers, that there is nothing higher than to give loving and humble service to our brothers and sisters in the human family.

But no matter what type of good work we do as Christians, the summit and source of it all must be the Eucharist. And so the Holy Father Pope John Paul II wrote to remind us Priests and all Catholic people:

“Before this extraordinary reality we find ourselves amazed and overwhelmed, so deep is the humility by which God “stoops” in order to unite himself with man! If we feel moved before the Christmas crib, when we contemplate the Incarnation of the Word, what must we feel before the altar where, by the poor hands of the priest, Christ makes his Sacrifice present in time? We can only fall to our knees and silently adore this supreme mystery of faith.”