

Holy Thursday Homily

Father Bob Gillelan

Today, Deacon Wentzel told me that there was an article in the National Catholic Register about the uptick in the number of candidates and catechumens coming into the Catholic Church this year in our nation.

So I found the article—and did you know that the Diocese of Harrisburg is number six in the entire nation for bringing in candidates and catechumens into the Church this year?

They're sitting right up front here—we now call them the elect.

The uptick for our diocese is 77% more than last year.

That's incredible. And in a way, it doesn't surprise me.

Because, as you know, I've been basing many of my homilies this past year on St. John's Christmas Gospel—the Prologue—where we hear that Jesus came into the world as the Light of the world.

And I think this increase is because people are being attracted to that Light—the Light who is Jesus Christ.

That's what they want. They want Jesus to be for them their way, their truth, and their life—especially in a world where there is so much darkness: the darkness of sin and error.

So there is this beautiful attraction to Christ, who is Light.

Tonight, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we see three manifestations of that Light.

One of the things we celebrate tonight is our Lord's institution of the priesthood.

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the priesthood in His wisdom and love, knowing that the Church would need shepherds to guide the flock—and ministers to continue the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass through time and space.

When we speak about the Mass, we speak about the sacrifice of Calvary.

Through Jesus, that same sacrifice is made present through time and space. Every time we celebrate the Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary is re-presented on this altar in an unbloody manner.

This brings us to the Eucharist—one of the most powerful and beautiful manifestations of Christ's Light and Love.

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives us Himself—His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—so that we may be more closely united to Him and to one another.

And along with this gift, Jesus gives us a commandment: that we love one another.

When Jesus speaks about love in the Gospels, He is often speaking about service—lovingly serving one another, following His example.

Holy Thursday sheds light on Good Friday. Good Friday is about sacrifice—the greatest sacrifice—Jesus giving His life on the Cross for our salvation.

The priesthood calls priests to a life of sacrifice. The Eucharist is Christ's sacrifice given to us. And loving service requires sacrifice from each of us.

So tonight, there is certainly cause for rejoicing.

Let us continue to pray over these next few days for our candidates and catechumens—the elect—who will join us at the table of the Lord through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

May these days be filled with excitement and great peace for them.

And for ourselves, may our hearts be filled with gratitude, so that we may say with the psalmist:

“Lord, I offer to You a sacrifice of thanksgiving.”