

HOLY THURSDAY

I. Introduction

An office worker named Jeff was known for his easygoing, laid-back personality; as a result, he was somewhat lazy, which had caused him to be fired from other jobs on several occasions. One day his boss chewed him out in front of the entire office staff, telling him he had thirty days to get his act together or he'd find himself unemployed. Everyone expected Jeff to be upset or depressed over this ultimatum, but in fact, he was afterwards more cheerful than ever. When asked why, he explained, "Hey, I used to come to work every day not knowing if I was about to be fired; now I know I'll have a job for at least thirty more days!" (Steve May, *The Story File*, p. 286). This, of course, is not what his boss intended, and this lazy, irresponsible attitude isn't an option for us as Christians. We're supposed to be busy fulfilling our duties, avoiding the extremes of apathy and laziness on the one hand, and of excessive worry or caution on the other. When the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco was being built in the mid-1930s, several workers lost their lives when they fell from their very high and dangerous positions. From then on, all the workmen proceeded with extreme caution—which caused the pace of construction to slow down dramatically, putting the bridge far behind schedule. Finally someone had the idea of building a safety net under the construction area. This was the first time such a thing had ever been done, and at a cost of \$100,000 it was very expensive—but it worked: knowing that a fall would not result in their deaths, the workmen from then on proceeded at a much faster pace (Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book*, p. 342).

Jesus is our safety net, or source of security, as we proceed through life. This wonderful and important truth, however, isn't supposed to make us complacent or lazy; rather, it should inspire us to work all the harder and follow Him even more completely. How do we know if we are truly pleasing Him and living as His disciples? The answer is simple: through our willingness to serve others in His Name.

II. Development

At the Last Supper Our Lord knew He had less than 24 hours to live, and this knowledge quite naturally focused His mind on what was truly important. It was in this context that, as we see in the Gospel, He gave the apostles an example of service by washing their feet, and then commanding them to serve others in a similar manner. The Last Supper is more commonly remembered, of course, for Our Lord's institution of the Eucharist, in which He gave His followers His Body and Blood in the setting of a Passover meal; Jesus Himself became the sacrificial victim whose blood saves us from judgment—an idea logically developed or drawn forth from this evening's 1st and 2nd Readings. However, receiving Holy Communion—even if done with the utmost reverence and gratitude—doesn't reach its full potential if we keep its grace to ourselves; Our Lord intended this Sacrament to inspire and empower us to put our faith into practice by responding to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of those around us.

III. Conclusion

It was less than a year ago that Archbishop Vigneron released his pastoral letter *Unleash the Gospel*—a visionary and inspired document meant to make a profound difference in how we as Catholics live out our faith here in southeast Michigan. The pastoral letter calls us to become a bold and joyful band of missionary disciples, and instructs parishes to shift their focus from maintenance to mission; each one of us is supposed to become more responsive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and more committed to putting God at the center of our lives. The Archbishop is summoning all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Detroit to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to Christ and sharing their faith in Him with others, thereby playing their role in the New Evangelization. It's in this way that, with the help of God's grace, we will truly serve those around us in Christian charity and help transform our culture.

This is a bold and ambitious plan or vision; it's already bearing fruit in the areas of Gospel witness, church renewal, and personal spiritual growth on the part of many of our fellow Catholics—but much remains to be done. You and I are called to be part of this process, coming closer to God by becoming more willing to witness to Jesus Christ and serve others in His Name; this will prove our faith is living and authentic. In particular, we should read and study *Unleash the Gospel*, if we've not already done so; we should examine our own lives and personal values and priorities in light of the pastoral letter's challenges and suggestions; we should look for ways to become more active in our parish and our community; we should pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance in how to make a difference in our society; and we should try to be more alert and responsive to the opportunities the Lord gives us to be of service to others for the sake of the Gospel, while seeking to bless and influence them by our prayers and example.

Unlike the laidback office worker Jeff, we're not supposed to coast through life or take it easy when it comes to fulfilling our obligations; at the same time, however, we mustn't let ourselves be paralyzed by fear or go through life with excessive worry or caution, as did the workers on the Golden Gate Bridge during the early days of its construction. Jesus is with us at every moment, protecting us, guiding us, and, in effect, holding our hand on our journey through life. Moreover, He gives us Himself in the Eucharist so that we may share in His heavenly life even now. Holy Thursday is the celebration of this amazing Gift—but it's also our summons to answer Jesus by imitating His example of service. May our response to Him truly demonstrate our faith and thereby make a difference in the world.