
Bishop Bird's Homily on Holy Thursday 2013

St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat

Some time ago I visited a patient in hospital. All the years I had known him, he'd been a kindly man – concerned for other people, ready to share their joys in happy times and ready to share their sorrows in times of trouble. Now he was having a tough time himself, suffering from cancer and not expecting to live much longer. And yet, he still managed to show kindness to those around him. His kindness made a deep impression on the nurses who cared for him. In spite of his own problems he took an interest in what was happening in their lives. He would ask about their families and wish them well in all they were doing. He had been a man who cared for others all his life and he continued to show this care even in his last days.

In that respect, that patient in the hospital was like Christ himself. All through his life, Jesus showed love for those he met. In his final days he continued to show that love. As tonight's gospel said: "He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was." He loved them to the end.

On this Holy Thursday night we remember the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he died. During that supper he showed his love in two special ways. He washed his disciples' feet and he gave them his own body and blood under the appearance of bread and wine.

We heard the story of the washing of the feet a few moments ago in the gospel of John. Jesus washed his disciples' feet and wiped them with a towel. And in a few minutes time we'll see this story in action in the washing of the feet of members of the congregation. In the words of the gospel and in the ceremony of the washing of the feet, the message is the same. It's a message about the love of Christ. He came to love and serve. He came to love and serve to the end.

Then later in the Mass I will take the bread and wine and say the words that Christ said at the Last Supper: This is my body which will be given up for you. This is the chalice of my blood which will be poured out for you. Again we have a message about the love of Christ. He gives us his own body and blood as a sign that he loves us to the end.

And what does Christ ask of us? He asks us to follow his example. After he had washed their feet, Jesus said to his followers: "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you." Christ made himself a servant for us. He asks us to make ourselves servants for one another.

Then after he had taken the bread and wine and given them to his disciples as his own body and blood, he said: "Do this in memory of me." He asks us to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of him and he also asks us to give ourselves to one another as he gave himself to us.

As we continue the Mass now I invite you to give thanks for the love that Christ has shown us and I invite you to pray for the grace to follow Christ's example.

Like that patient in the hospital may we show real concern for others all through our life. Like Christ himself, may we show love for each person we meet. May we love one another day by day and may we continue to love right to the end.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR