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### **Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

Everything today is ironically happening contrary to the expected practices. Maundy Thursday without the washing of the feet, without physical communion on the body and blood of Christ, one would wonder: are we even having a proper Holy Thursday mass? Well, let us meditate on that.

“First of all, Maundy Thursday (also known as Holy Thursday, Covenant Thursday, Great and Holy Thursday, Sheer Thursday, and Thursday of Mysteries, among other names. The English word maundy in that name for the day is derived through Middle English and Old French mandé, from the Latin mandatum (also the origin of the English word "mandate"), the first word of the phrase "Mandatum novum do vobis..." ("A new commandment I give unto you ...") a statement made by Jesus in the Gospel of John 13:34 by which Jesus explained to the Apostles the significance of his action of washing their feet". I was quoting Wikipedia!

One clear message from today's gospel, where we hear Jesus Christ washing his disciples' feet, is that just after Christ created the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the one of the Orders, he does a gesture that becomes a new commandment. Actually, that gesture is part of those two sacraments: service is part the Eucharist and Holy Orders.

It is almost obvious that when a person is sure that they are about to die, they try to leave a legacy to those they love. That gesture, the washing of the feet, even though the disciples had to forget the rest of the deeds of their Lord, should remain inscribed in their heart. I would guess that no one among us, who would have lost a loved one, would forget the last moments they spent together. In my case, my father, before his death, asked me about the reaction of the Dominican fathers to whom I had sent a letter. He wanted to make sure that I was happy with the decision I was about to take. He also wanted it to stay in my mind that he gave me his blessing if I had to choose later to join "those people" he had never heard of. A similar thing is happening in today's gospel. Jesus wants them to remember the washing of the feet when he will be gone. In other words, Jesus is telling them: even though you may forget that I walked on the water, that I cursed a tree when I was hungry and many other things I did, you should not forget that I live you a new commandment which is that you should serve the little ones.



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According to some sources Jesus in that gesture does three steps usually done by three slaves in rich households: to remove the sandals, to wash the feet and to dry them... In other words he becomes a total slave.

Coming to the Eucharist and communion:

I believe that in all traditions around the world, when you share food and drink with someone, it somehow means that you are living some sort of unity. Jesus himself was accused of sharing food and drinks with tax collectors and sinners. But more than that: I would guess that my experience of sharing food with others is also yours. At Sacré-Coeur, every Saturday, we have a table for those who struggle to find food. It is set in an interreligious way but we also welcome those who do not subscribe to any faith. My experience is that when someone has been coming and then they disappear, I start worrying about them. Sometimes our coordinator who knows where some of them live, take food to their shelters.

How open to others are our Eucharistic celebrations? How open to other are we in the settings of our Christian community? Who does miss us when we are in isolations in our families without a possibility to have communion on the body of our Lord together. Whom do we forget when we are joyfully having communion among us?

The very understandable concerns that we may have about the validity of our Maundy Thursday are exactly founded on the fact that we neither have the washing of the feet today nor communion on the body and blood of Christ (well, the friars will have communion on the body). This Covid-19 pandemic is helping us understand that some things are more than how we are used to doing them. Recently Father Darren Dias said that the fact that we do not have masses with the usual liturgical settings because of this Corona Virus crisis, could awaken us to other ways of being Church.

What do we mean for example when we talk about communion? A place where I would comfortably go with my family, eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ, listen to a nice choir singing my favourite music, and go back home ignoring the person next to me! Well, fortunately that is not the case in the 10 churches I've been to here in Toronto (plus two in Montreal).



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As much as we need to live communion in our gatherings on Sunday, together in a church, we need to go beyond. Do we really feel in communion with the person sitting next to us at church on Sunday, or is it one of the many duties I fulfil because I have been told that it is mandatory in my Church?

Well, this covid-19 is showing us that we can be Church even while staying in our rooms. Maybe our communion should go beyond the Church as house where we joyfully gather on Sundays. Maybe we could extend our washing of the feet to those who are lost in calamities oftentimes around the world or that are mentioned only when we become scared on huge migrations.

As much as we may be nice and loving Christian communities, may we come out of this pandemic purified and made better, just as fire purifies the Gold and makes it better.

**Gustave Ineza, O.P.**