



**Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem**

## **Homily of Archbishop Pizzaballa for Holy Thursday 2018**



### **Chrism Mass and the Lord's Supper**

Dear Friends,

We are gathered here, as the Church of Christ living in Jerusalem, to celebrate the Lord's last night in this city, the night when He was betrayed. The remembrance we make of it in every Eucharistic celebration does not take away the intensity and emotion of this celebration: on the contrary, here today we are here reminded that we cannot enter the mystery of the Lord's Passover without going through that night. We celebrate it not as a mere memorial, but in that mysterious and real contemporaneity between our days and the Hour of Christ accomplished by the Holy Spirit each time that we celebrate the divine mysteries. If in its historicity, the life of Christ is already complete with the Father, what He experienced in Himself and for us remains and is continually given to us in faith and the sacraments.

In qua nocte tradebaturí . For the evangelists and Paul, this is not only a chronological annotation. For Jesus and the apostles, it was the night of the heart and the spirit, the night of betrayal and denial; the night when all the enthusiasm and promises that had resonated in the days of the Master seemed to fade away. That night, the night when He was betrayed, every light seemed to go out and the hour of darkness seemed to win. The night that Abraham was spared had to reach fulfillment here. Fear and agitation seized the Lord's heart and made the disciples fearful. It seemed to them that the only way to survive on that night was a sad and resigned sleep or the sword of violence.

But it was not so for Jesus. As we've heard: "the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread and, having given thanks, He broke it and said: «This is my body, which is for you; Do this in memory of me». In the same way, after supper was ended, He took the cup, saying: «This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, every time you drink it, in memory of me»" (I Cor. 11:23-25). For Him, the hour of betrayal and failure became the hour of greatest love. His answer was not one of escape, of sleep, or the sword but the gift of self to the end. At a time when promises and human consent ceased, He relied on the Promise of the Kingdom. When every hope of success failed, He trusted in the Will of God, Who placed in His hands the entire omnipotence of His love. He responded to the fear and disturbance of the apostles with a boundless trust in His Father. To violence and the sword, to strategic calculations and the attraction of money, Jesus puts forward fraternal service and sharing until death. That night, thanks to Him, was transformed into the night of the love that gives and forgives, a night of consolation that encourages and awakens, a night of the chalice that, drunk to the end, prepares the feast of the Kingdom. And the last evening became the prelude to Easter! That night, therefore, is kept in the heart of the Church, as an announcement of the true night of liberation. It returns there with grateful memory every day and every year, to find again light and courage, grace and consolation for your journey.

I would also like to return there, together with you, to ask the Lord Jesus to help us go over again and live with Him the many nights of our life and our ministry in this holy and difficult land and to recover a sense and perspective for the days and steps that await us. We do not need much imagination to recognize that sometimes even our priestly ministry and our pastoral efforts

seem to go through the night. There are many reasons that seem to extinguish trust and obscure hope. There are internal and external difficulties, challenges to individuals and communities, the always very tense and uncertain social and political climate, and the violence that often frightens and halt life and projects. Added to these, there is a sense of feeling powerless and of being strangers in our land and among the people. We also confront the departure of many Christian families and the fear of being left alone and isolated. As for the disciples on that night, also for us, the temptations to escape and resignation, to rage and violence appear as the only possible reaction to the difficult times that are before us. The Lord, however, offers us a different path: *ōI have given you an example so that as I have done, you also should doö* (Jn 13:15).

By accepting to enter fully into our nights, Christ has not removed fear in all its forms: the fear of misunderstanding and loneliness, abandonment and betrayal, fatigue and physical and psychological suffering, to the point of death. The awareness of being the Son did not prevent Him from experiencing the weakness of the flesh, the violence of the temptation, and the instinctive feeling of anguish and rejection in the face of the tragedy of death. And yet, death itself, which is the place where all human fears are condensed, has become, thanks to obedience to the Father and love for His friends, the place of liberation and life. It's a paradox, I know, it's the paradox of the cross. Through it, impotence and failure are transformed into a source of hope. Christ did not defeat death by running away from it, but by passing through it, lovingly bearing its weight and splitting it open with trust and hope in the mystery of the Father.

The Lord invites us, through the Church, to renew the promises of our priestly ordination. He gives us, in this celebration, the Oil of consolation, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation. He assures us that if we persevere with Him in offering ourselves and in the service of our brothers, we can also transform the present night into a tomorrow of resurrection and joy. In this place especially, where Love revealed itself stronger than death and where the Light of the Risen Christ has dispelled the darkness of heart and spirit. The Light reminds us that if we continue to love and give ourselves to love more and continue to give all the way to forgiving, we will participate from now on in His paschal victory. It is the victory of the grain of wheat that seems to die, but in reality, is bearing fruit. Our mission in this

land, even among the difficulties with which we are acquainted, is nevertheless experienced in faith, in hope, and in love. It is lived in the free and generous gift of ourselves. It is our concrete way of doing as the Lord has done so that there may be a resurrection for us and our Church. There are no shortcuts to arrive at Easter: betrayal and sword, subterfuge and compromises prolong and do not shorten the night. The victory of Love comes only after the sacrifice of Love. The Risen One is the Crucified One!

We have been signed with the Oil of the catechumens so as not to fail in the struggle. We are sent with the Oil of the Sick to console and to heal. We are consecrated with the Oil of Chrism to prolong the priesthood of Christ in the world. Therefore, we do not wish to pursue nor can we pursue other paths but only the glorious Way of the Cross to have a new fruitfulness of life and ministry.

Therefore, I say to all; firstly, to the Auxiliary Bishops, priests, seminarians, religious men and women who more share intimately with me the apostolic ministry in the service of this Church, and then to You, lay faithful, who believe in the name of Jesus, to You, pilgrims, who unite yourselves in these holy days to our hope and our prayer: Courage! Let us not allow fear and resignation to slow down or stop the progress of the Gospel in our Land! Let us continue with joy to distribute the bread of life to everyone! Let us insist on building among ourselves, and with everyone, friendly relationships and bonds of communion! There is no night that love cannot enlighten, there is no failure that the Cross cannot transform, there is no wound that Paschal Mystery cannot transfigure! As the Apostle says: "This saying is trustworthy:

If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him" (2 Tm. 2:11-12), and what today appear to us to be signs of the end will become, by His grace and our faith, prophecy of new beginnings!

A Happy Easter, in the faith that believes all, in the hope that sees all, in the love that gives all!

+Pierbattista Pizzaballa  
Apostolic Administrator