

The Father

Holy Thursday 2020

Dear brothers and sisters, I celebrate this Mass “in Coena Domini” in a Large Church apparently empty! Yes, only apparently, because never before has the presence and closeness of the whole charismatic Cottolengo family scattered throughout the world, priests and religious, religious and lay people, felt as strong as in these days, even though they could not be physically together. In the Risen Christ, alive, truly present in the Eucharist, sacrament of unity and bond of charity, we really are “Many one Body”, in the Little House and in the Church. I greet the men and women religious: I know how much it costs you today, perhaps for the first time since you consecrated your life to the Lord, not to be able to physically participate in the Easter triduum in a Church. A suffered renunciation proportionate to love for the One who gives meaning to your life: this too we bring to the altar today. I greet the residents and the sick: the Eucharist is the medicine of immortality, the Church sings! In fact Jesus said, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Yes, life on this earth can also end, hopefully without too much suffering, but life in God, the life of those who have fed on the Eucharistic bread, that is not! It is forever and it is because we have been made sharers in the divine nature, as the Apostle Peter recalls. With you, dear residents and the sick, I greet the health and care workers and all those who are part of the life of the Little House through their work. Thank you for your presence even in these difficult days. But allow me today to address a special greeting, and a word full of affection and gratitude to the priests on the day when we remember the great gift which, worthlessly, we have received from the Lord: to be ministers of God, sharing in the pastoral mission of the Church. For you dear Brothers, in particular to Fr. Pasquale Schiavulli, to Fr. Paolo Boggio and to Fr. Francesco Gemello, our prayer goes; for all the gratitude of the Little House and the Church for your generous ministry. Dear Brothers, we know well that we are priests not only because we celebrate the sacraments or the divine office to which we have committed ourselves before God and his people; we are always priests, because we are priests in our flesh because of that chrismal anointing which has radically Christified us in the priesthood and for which all our actions are priestly. It does not matter what service is asked of us and, by the grace of God, it does not even matter if our health allows us an operative ministry, because we know that, if we want to, we are always in conformity with the Good Shepherd and through friendship with Him we can always give our lives for His flock and for all humanity. The priestly dimension in the life of the presbyter knows no reserved and dedicated spaces, but throughout our existence we are asked to bring men to God and God to men. This is not always easy and knowing that Judas, the betrayer, was also

an apostle makes us tremble. Today is the day that, looking at the greatness of the gift received, we cannot but ask forgiveness from the good Lord for our sins and our misery - at least I am! - Luckily, however, not only Judas but also Peter was an apostle and his strength to begin again after denying the Lord even in the last hours of his life encourages and comforts us. I am sure that there is no norm that can make our life faithful, but love! Looking at Christ, contemplating him, contemplating love-crucified, making his feelings our own, this can make us faithful, generous and happy: faithful to priestly commitments, generous in pastoral mission, joyful for such a great meaning that we can give to our lives. The Gospel page that we have listened to tells us that the stole and the apron can never be separated, that the Eucharist celebrated can never be separated from a life given in service to our brothers and sisters through prayer and offering. Last Sunday Pope Francis recalled that “a life is useless if one does not serve”. We understand that this involves the gift of self to the point of conformation to Christ crucified, but we also understand that only from there can come the sense of an existence in which one can even renounce a bride, have children, a natural family; only from there can fidelity come to martyrdom, but also experience the joy that the Lord gives to his friends. We have an example: the priestly heart of Saint Joseph Cottolengo! From his pastoral passion, from the ardor to proclaim in a credible way the Love of God the provident father and the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Little House was born. His generosity was as admirable as his fidelity, to the point of giving his life by infecting himself in assisting the sick with typhus. Where was the source of this generous and faithful love? The constant exhortations to live in good account with God and in union with Him were not the teaching of a doctrine but the sharing of an experience, that is why his short and simple sayings are so convincing. Today, dear brothers and sisters, let us remember not only the gift of the priesthood but also the institution of the Eucharist and the new commandment. Every time we participate in the Eucharistic banquet we listen repeated: “This is my Body which will be given up for you”. This is my Body given for you: fidelity to these words we will contemplate tomorrow, Good Friday; today we rejoice in the gift of always having with us the sacramental presence of Christ! It's as if the Master were telling us: you're not alone, I'm with you! He says it to everyone and he says it in particular to those who are fighting these days to live or to make live. On the contrary, the Lord reminds them in a special way: I am not only with you but I am also in you! Thank you Jesus because you loved yours to the end, you loved yours making yourself man, you loved the world making yourself bread, you loved them to the cross. Be blessed and while we sing our gratitude we invoke you: increase our faith, strengthen our hope, strengthen our charity. Amen.

Father Carmine Arice