



Message to Priests for Holy Thursday
2 April 2026
His Eminence Frank Cardinal Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto

Servants of Communion

My dear Brother Priests,

May Jesus and Mary be in your souls.

We enter into the Sacred Triduum with the Mass of the Lord's Supper (*in Coena Domini*), recalling the Institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood. At every Eucharistic celebration – and especially on this night – we are drawn sacramentally into that same Hour. Those life-giving words of Christ: “Do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me” (Lk 22:19) lead us to rediscover who we are and what we are called to be. As a brother who shares with you the weight and the wonder of the ministerial priesthood, I wish to reflect on the nature of our **calling**, our unique **bond**, and the **path** upon which the Holy Spirit is currently leading us in the Church.

The **Institution of the Eucharist** and the **Priesthood** invite us to actively behold and work in our shared vocation and journey of listening, discerning, and working under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Upper Room was, in a profound sense, the first *synodal* gathering of the Church: **Jesus present at/as the centre** (as he always must be in our lives, ministries and communities); **the apostles are gathered around him** (they form a brotherhood of those called and sent, recognizing that Christ is their focus and the life from which all good things begin and radiate); **the Word is proclaimed** (the eternal truths that enlighten and brighten, console, convict and empower us); **the gift of Sacrificial love instituted** (the *Sacramentum caritatis* which is the nourishment and lifeline of our existence) and the **command (*Mandatum*) of humble service given** (the spending of our life in witnessing and for the salvation of souls): truly we see in these ecclesial and typically priestly characteristics the very foundations of communion, participation, and mission. As the source and summit of Christian life, the Eucharist is truly the pattern for our life together. We do not create communion as much as we receive it – *Eucharistia facit ecclesiam*. Communion is a gift before it is a task, it must be received before it can be shared. As priests of the new and eternal covenant, called to walk authentically with Our Lord and with others, we recognize that the mystery of Christ's self-giving love both create and sustain the bonds of our communion *in Ecclesia*. The Eucharist forms us into one Body, dissolving the temptations of isolation and self-sufficiency. The more deeply we ourselves are conformed to the Eucharistic Lord – broken and given for others – the more our presbyterate and our faith communities will become places of authentic listening, trust, and co-responsibility.

We are bound sacramentally to Jesus Christ the High Priest, configured to him so that we may serve his Mystical Body – a beautiful and compelling mystery. The sacred gift we received at our ordination is always understood within the broader mystery of the Priestly People of God. How do we live this sacred gift? What does service look like? As we note in the life of the nascent Church (Acts 15:1–29), our ministry exists not in competition with, but in service to others, in service to



communion. In instituting the sacred priesthood, Our Lord did not create a closed circle of privilege; he established a sacramental ministry ordered toward the sanctification and mission of the whole Church and the whole world. As Vatican II's dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 10 clearly teaches: "Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ." This doctrine has profound implications for how we understand **charisms** as well. The Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost but anticipated at the Last Supper, distributes gifts abundantly in the Church. He gives to us not only the **seven gifts** which are for us and meant for our own proper and personal sanctification; he likewise affords the charismatic, special gifts meant to build up the Body of Christ, thus, given to us but not for us – to be shared with others. These charisms are not accidental accessories; they are concrete manifestations of the Spirit's presence, given for the common good.

Indeed, our shepherding is marked by the need to listen and to lead, not suffocate what the Lord is accomplishing in our midst. Are we not called to help discern and develop, call forth, encourage and coordinate these particular gifts for the life of our communities? As *servants of communion*, we are called to actively encourage participation that **empowers Parish Pastoral Councils and lay leaders**, not out of a desire to *outsource* work, but rather out of recognition for the variety of charisms God has gifted our community, and our desire to cooperate with him. Unfortunately, it is easier to manage than to discern, easier to control than to accompany. Yet the Spirit often speaks through the faithful in ways that surprise us. **Our task is to help bring these gifts into harmony with the Church's mission and with one another.** Just like the Sacrament of Matrimony, Holy Orders is fundamentally a "sacrament at the service of communion." According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1534: "Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God." Consequently, the priest, in his core identity, is a **man of communion** – one who fosters unity without stifling legitimate novelty, who safeguards sacred doctrine while encouraging creativity in charity, and who sees authentic expressions of charisms as a participation in Christ's mission and a means of sanctification. Let us often reflect on what the Apostle to the Gentiles reminded the early Christians: "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The Last Supper is often framed in terms of "institution" however, it was also a place of deep and profound **listening**. The disciples listened to the Lord's farewell discourse, struggled with confusion and fear, and received promises of the Holy Spirit who would guide them into all truth. That atmosphere of attentive listening is the seedbed of discernment. Discernment is not endless discussion, but a shared attentiveness to the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is an ecclesial act, rooted in prayer, Scripture, communion with Holy Mother Church and fidelity with the Deposit of Faith. As priests, we are called to cultivate interior silence amid the noise of pastoral demands, grounding decisions not merely in efficiency or precedent, but in sustained prayer. The more we allow ourselves to be formed by Christ's gaze, the more capable we become of perceiving his will for our communities.



No reflection on Holy Thursday would be complete without contemplating the **washing of the feet**. The Lord, having loved his own, loved them to the end – and he expressed that love in an act of radical **humility**. He who is Master and Lord knelt before his disciples and commanded them to do likewise. Here lies the deepest foundation of our ministry: **humble service**. Without humility, listening becomes strategy; without charity, collaboration becomes corporatism. The gesture of washing feet reveals that authority in the Church is cruciform. It bends low. It makes space. It bears burdens. It forgives. The washing of feet also reminds us that we ourselves must allow Christ to cleanse us. Peter's initial resistance – "You will never wash my feet" – echoes our own reluctance to acknowledge vulnerability. Yet unless we allow the Lord to purify and renew us, our service risks becoming activism rather than grace-filled ministry. True humility requires risk because it asks for transparency and by extension vulnerability. **Our fraternity, mutual support, and honest dialogue are crucial and these are essential signs of communion**. When we listen to one another, pray for one another, forgive one another and bear one another's burdens, we offer a credible witness to the unity we preach.

My dear brothers in the sacred priesthood of Jesus Christ – diocesan, religious, active and retired – **Thank You**. Thank you for the "Yes" you uttered devoutly and wholeheartedly years ago, and for the "Yes" you live out every day. Thank you for your patience with me, for your prayers for me, for your support to me and for the countless hidden sacrifices you make daily for the sake of the Kingdom. Thank you for the invaluable contribution you make to further the radiance and underscore the beauty of the Archdiocese of Toronto, our blessed local Church and spiritual home in which we pray the Lord may be pleased to dwell and accept our praise and worship of Him. I pray that we may grow more and more together into those sacred ministers of the Word and the altar, of the sacraments and ecclesial communion, of spiritual and social transformation, who strive to serve rather than seek to be served after the example and teaching of our Eternal High Priest. May we be centered only on Christ, attentive to the Spirit, welcoming the divine gifts and reaching out to shepherd in pastoral charity especially the lost sheep in our midst. As always, I entrust each of you to the maternal mediation and powerful intercession of Our Lady, Mother of Priests and I pray that the grace of this Holy Thursday will renew in us the joy of our priesthood and deepen our commitment to walk together with the People of God toward the fullness of Easter life.

Yours sincerely in Jesus with Mary,

+ Frank Card. Leo

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