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Homily at Mass Holy Thursday – 18 April 2019

Easter is a Christian festival. But interestingly the Church doesn't begin our celebration in the church but rather in the homes of any number of families, our Jewish neighbours, here in Glen Huntly and Caulfield. The first reading at Mass tonight describes the Passover Meal first celebrated by the Hebrew people in their homes on the night they fled Egypt, led by Moses out into desert. Even today the Passover Meal includes a roasted lamb, various symbolic herbs and glasses of wine and a ritual question and answer session between the father of the family and others seated at the table. At the Passover Meal faithful Jews still recall all that God did for them in rescuing them from slavery, leading them through the desert, forming them as God's People, giving them his Law, and finally bringing them into their own land, a land of milk and honey, the Promised Land.

St Paul retains the same memory of a Passover Meal celebrated by Jesus and his apostles that each of the Gospel witnesses describe – some scholars say that Paul's account was probably the first to be written down. Breaking from the ritual of the Passover Meal, Jesus did something on this night that faithful Christians have never forgotten – he took bread and a cup of wine from the table, and said words that we hear recited and proclaimed at the Altar each day, each Sunday: "This is my Body ... This is my Blood ... do this in memory of me."

With these words and this action – holding the bread and cup in his hands, sharing them with the Twelve – Jesus gave us the Eucharist – "my flesh ... my blood ... real food and real drink." two years before he died, St John Paul II gave us perhaps his last will and testament, an encyclical letter named *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." In every generation, beginning from the Upper Room where Jesus celebrated Passover and his sacrifice on the Cross, Christ the Lord has fed and nourished his Church with himself, his Body and Blood, his gift. You and I draw our life from the Eucharist you and I celebrate – the Word of God teaches us, forms us, calls us to life in Christ. The Eucharist we celebrate at the Altar is Christ's sacrifice re-called, re-presented, re-newed: Christ lifts us up to the Father in his arms outstretched on the Cross; Christ feeds and strengthens us with his Eucharistic gift with hands still marked with the wounds of the nails.

The ministry of Christ continues in his Church – among us – in the ministry of priests. One priest I know speaks of priests as "men of God for others". St John Paul II would always speak of priests as representatives of Christ the priest and head. Throughout the centuries priests have been thought of and spoken of as "other Christs." How do priests today think of themselves? This is something that priests have been wondering about and talking about a lot especially in recent months. The priesthood in Melbourne has certainly lived under the dark shadow of terrible crimes which have made all priests feel shame and disgrace. This shadow has also caused an icy chill to run down the spine of all Catholics too. I've felt this shadow put over me as I've walked on the streets and in the shops. This shadow has also worked to silence the Church, especially our bishops, when the voice of the Church needs to be heard in a society riven by moral questions that cry out for leadership – like late term abortion,

confusion around marriage and now euthanasia that will soon confront us beginning mid year.

In the history of the Church of Australia I don't think there has ever been a time when there is so much need for the Church and her witness to Christ, nor such pain, nor – for priests who dress as priests – so much personal cost.

Friends, together we begin this year's Paschal Triduum. In the Upper Room with Christ – on Calvary with Christ – in Christ's "rising from the spiced tomb" (St Patrick) in the victory of his resurrection. This year, let's walk this journey together!