

HOLY THURSDAY

The astronauts Aldrin and Armstrong landed on the moon on July 20th 1969. Armstrong prepared for his moon-walk while Aldrin unpacked bread and wine. Aldrin describes what happened, and how he felt. "I poured the wine into the chalice. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. It was interesting to think that, the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements. I sensed especially strongly my unity with our church back home and the church everywhere"

At the last Supper our Lord made himself sacramentally present for us in the form of Bread and wine. The Church describes the Mass as the sacrament of love and a sign of unity. My personal union with Jesus helps me to recognise him in every individual I meet. But it doesn't stop there.

Just like with Neil Armstrong, the Eucharist should also have a cosmic significance for us. We feel an affinity with our brothers and sisters in other parts of this world. We become concerned about what causes division within the human family. We're not happy with the gulf which exists, for instance, between the rich and poor nations, between the Muslim and Christian world and are prepared to do something about it.

Our Lord came to draw all men and women of goodwill together into a collective force for good in the world. That is the ongoing mission of the church. With His strength we will be able to combat the dark forces of individualism and consumerism which fuels self-indulgence to the detriment of the world wide family.

It is a well-known fact that the Christian church is doing more than any other large organization to highlight the divisions

within our world. The Catholic Church, for instance gives more to alleviate poverty in our world than any other organization, including governments. When there is a lot of talk about Brexit these days it would be good to keep in mind that it was the church, particularly the Catholic Church which, over the centuries drew the diverse peoples of Europe together and helped lay the foundations of our European civilization. This is very rarely mentioned in history books but it cannot be refuted. Some may interject and ask what about our 20th century wars and the cold war. Well, they were inflicted upon Europe by godless atheistic regimes which singled out the church for persecution.

Some years ago Pope Benedict spoke of his deep regret that there is not even a mention of the Church in the newly devised European Constitution. He said there was a real danger of Europe losing its soul. That was about four years ago. And maybe the bombing outrages we've seen in Brussels this week and Paris in November are consequences of Europe losing its Christian soul paving the way for misguided extremists. I'm told that a lot of the churches in Paris and Brussels have pathetic numbers coming to Mass. The recent outrages in Europe are a wake-up for christian Europe and indeed all of us.

The Mass is the life blood of the Christian community. The self sacrifice of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist should challenge us to work against those things which cause rupture within our human family. It is Christ who heals the wounds of sin and division. Strengthened by the Eucharist, may we be empowered to bring his healing energy to the brokenness of our world?