



MEDITATION on Holy Thursday

John 13: 1-15

Jesus is the ultimate servant leader. He led by example. He said, “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

His example, given in tonight’s Gospel, is the washing of the feet of his disciples. It’s a rather foreign concept to most of us, even though most of us have heard this reading every Holy Thursday of our lives. John does not give detail about the Passover Supper, *per se*, although he does state that Jesus “rose from supper (supper before the feast of the Passover), laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel...” and proceeded to pour water into a basin and wash the feet of his disciples. John even paints the picture of Jesus drying the feet of his disciples with the towel with which he was girded. We can easily imagine these actions.



One person recently wrote that he especially likes to think of the foot washing tradition in light of the Middle East needs of Jesus' day--walking everywhere, with dusty feet. He brings attention to the foot washing being “the simple act of a host offering water to wash feet, the height of welcoming and caring.” It’s more complicated than that, however, for foot washing was usually done by servants. Jesus was a Rabbi who was turning the expected up-side-down. That is why Peter was nonplussed at the suggestion that Jesus would even consider washing his feet.

Poor Peter...he was caught off guard when Jesus stooped to wash his feet. Jesus was teaching Peter, the others, and us that to be his disciple we too need to stoop and serve others with love and charity. The commandment conveyed is to love one another.

Only John

The washing of the disciples' feet is an account unique to the Gospel of John. None of the other gospels tell of it, the epistles never notice it, and Luke never says a word concerning its practice in the early accounts of the church in the Book of Acts. This suggests that John wanted to point to a particular teaching in Jesus' ministry, i.e., to servant leadership, servant leadership being that practice which emphasizes that by serving Christ, by serving one another, we discover the path to spiritual integrity and peacefulness.

The Lord's Supper

Tonight we experience the holiness of the final Passover meal Jesus shared with his closest followers.

Mark's Gospel, the earliest Gospel, gives details of the blessing of the bread and the cup of wine at the Passover meal. So does Matthew and so does Luke, the alternative reading appointed for tonight. As noted earlier, John focused his witness on the unexpected feet washing actions and in particular, Peter's amazed reaction to Jesus' demonstration of servant leadership.

Corinthians (11:23-36 (27-32))

The Eucharistic prayers of the Mass we celebrate every Sunday and on other occasions, such as tonight, come from the reported words of Jesus, depicted beautifully in the letter to the Corinthians. We hear that Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, shared it. This is what we who celebrate the Eucharist have the privilege of sharing with the community of faith all over the world. We shall do that again together this holy night.

Holiness

Our manna from heaven, as Christians, is found in the breaking of the bread at the Eucharistic table. God is what we seek, God is what we experience, in the breaking of the bread in the community of faith. May this encounter with the Holy be treasured this night and may we share this joy in the way we serve Christ through the love we share with one another.

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