

‘You ought to wash one another’s feet’

This week has brought so many surprises to Jesus’s followers.

And we continue to wonder at the vast richness of belief which God has bequeathed to us.

We heard in the first reading from Exodus about the first Passover feast where each family was to sacrifice an unblemished lamb as a sign of their covenant with God. Then, in the second reading from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the establishment of the Eucharist. At that Passover meal ... which we sometimes call The Last Supper ... our Lord Jesus Christ made Himself the sacrifice. Christ became the unblemished lamb, the beginning of the New Covenant with God.

The third reading from John’s Gospel describes the *mandatum*, the command from Jesus to “wash one another’s feet.”

There, at the Last Supper, our Lord and Savior – God the Son!!! -- took off His cloak and performed the duty of the lowest of servants. He washed the feet of those whom He had chosen to continue His work here on Earth ... and He showed them what they were chosen to do as He encouraged them to live lives of self emptying love for the world.

Through His example, we learned that to bear the name "Christian," we must be humble. We must display this kind of love in the midst of a broken and wounded world that is waiting for rebirth. This is the world which He still loves even when the world may not love Him. It is a world continually being created anew as He continues His salvific work through the Church.

Tonight, our pastor, "*in persona Christi*" ... "in the person of Christ" ... will remove his chasuble and stole, don a simple apron, take a basin of warm water, and wash the feet of twelve people ... people chosen to symbolize the sacrificial service of love offered by this whole parish. This foot washing is more than a reenactment of an historic event; it is an invitation to participate in the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus Christ through His Church.

A dozen years ago, I was chosen by our pastor for this incredible gesture of humble service ... except that I was the one who was humbled. Tears flowed from my eyes as I considered what our pastor had done for me ... and I shivered at the thought of our Lord and Savior humbling himself to wash the filth from the feet of the Twelve He had chosen to carry on His work.

Can you imagine any world leader, any corporate CEO, any university president, stooping down to wash his employees' feet?

Can you imagine Jesus washing your feet?

Those of you who are parents will have bathed your children. Married couples will have bathed their spouses in times of illness or injury. Some of us will have bathed our elderly parents when they became unable to do it themselves.

But ... bathe the feet of a stranger ... ? Yes! It is what He has called us to do. Remember, Jesus said "You ought to wash one another's feet"!

But let's not get stuck on such a limited definition. There are men and women in this congregation who symbolically "wash the feet" of strangers – no, not strangers ... our neighbors! – on a regular basis.

Those who are Ministers to the Sick take the Eucharist to those who are unable to come to Mass, including people they have never met before.

Our Parish Health Ministry volunteers "wash the feet" of those who need a caring hand from trained health professionals.

Members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society routinely “wash the feet” of people in need, the overwhelming majority of whom are not parishioners. These Vincentians “wash the feet” of these individuals and families by literally donning their aprons and serving meals to the homeless at the soup kitchen downtown ... as well as by figuratively donning their aprons to bring food, clothing, help with prescriptions, car repairs, and even rent and mortgage assistance to people who find themselves unemployed, scared and unable to feed their own children. They even help to bury the impoverished.

There are so many opportunities like these for the type of service that Jesus has commanded, His *mandatum*, to literally serve others. To get down on our knees to help those who cannot help themselves ... to become servants to the poorest of the poor ... to humble ourselves as servants to the voiceless and disenfranchised ... to “wash the feet” of those who need help in the worst way.

How many of us will follow our Lord and Savior’s command to wash one another’s feet?

Will you?

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