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“If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (John 13:18).

*Acts 13:15-25; John 13:16-20*

If you have maps that track Paul's missionary journeys, you will see the three loops he made up into Asia Minor and Greece and back to Jerusalem, then the final journey in captivity that took him across the Mediterranean and all the way to Rome. Along with the sea voyages, Paul is estimated to have traveled over 10,000 miles *on foot* to preach the Gospel and pastor the communities he founded.

When Jesus chose foot washing as the final lesson in humility to his disciples, he may have had in mind the distances they would travel to share the Gospel. The line from Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who brings good news," may have been a joke among Paul's companions, but at least they had the benefit of the network of Roman roads to travel on. All of the Apostles were to take up the message from their master, whose feet were nailed to a cross by Rome to stop his revolution, and they brought that revolution to the very heart of the empire.

Today's Gospel passage reminds us that Jesus' mission first had to survive betrayal, denial and abandonment by his own followers. After he washed their feet, including those of Judas, Jesus brought home the importance of this astonishing act. He was their master, yet he performed for them the basest task of the lowliest household slave. Lest they take this as only a gesture or symbol, he then said to them, "If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it."

Liturgy challenges us to see beyond the rituals to the realities we are to put into action. The Mass and the Eucharist are incomplete if we do not take them into our lives and act on them. The breaking of the bread, like the washing of feet, is our celebration of the death of the Lord. He humbled himself, becoming a servant. He laid down his life for us. For Paul, the most stunning aspect of his conversion, what fueled his determination to live out the rest of his life in service of the Gospel, was the realization that the Jesus he was persecuting in his followers was the crucified Christ. The Lord who seized him with love and sent him to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth had laid down his life for him.

The Easter season extends to Pentecost and invites us to ponder these mysteries in prayer and in the daily readings. But even more, we are being drawn into a life-changing conversion that leads to an encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. The Holy Spirit seeks a home in our minds and hearts. Blessed are we when that same Spirit reaches to our feet and sends us to share the Gospel in service.

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