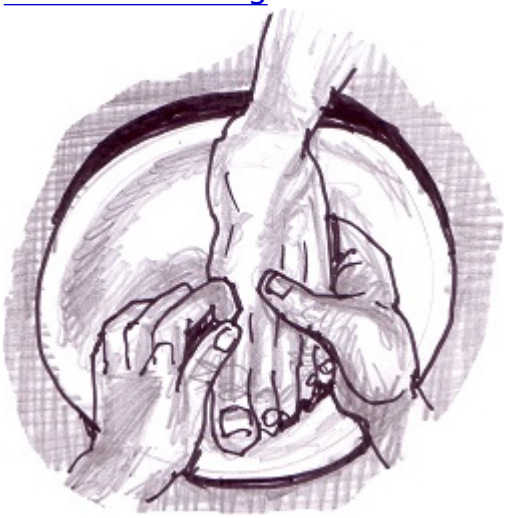
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (John 13:17).

Acts 13:13-25: Jn 13:16-20

In Acts 13, we see what a good teacher Paul was in drawing his audience in Antioch into the familiar narrative of their own salvation history. From God’s decision to call the Hebrews to be his chosen people, then rescuing them from slavery in the Exodus, then leading them through the desert to take possession of the promised land and then through the rise of their champion, King David, Paul brings them to the astonishing claim that Jesus was the savior promised to them as Messiah from the House of David.

Jesus was also a master teacher, using parables with the crowds to draw them into the mystery of the Kingdom of God, signs and symbols like water, light, salt and bread to illustrate the power of God penetrating their ordinary lives. With his disciples, Jesus taught more directly, explaining the parables, revealing the secret of his own intimate relationship with God, his Father, and their own entry into the mystery.

Jesus also did something that ought to be the goal of every lesson: He led his disciples to act. In today’s Gospel passage, he had just finished washing their feet when he asks them if they have understood the lesson. He then tells them to do as he has just done. If he, their master, washes their feet, then they must in turn be humble servants to each other. This is graduation day, their commencement moment. “Go and do likewise.”

Our formation as disciples of Jesus does not end on the written page or in the spoken word. As we grow in understanding, we need to ask Jesus in prayer, “What do I do now?” How will I demonstrate that I understand you and your life, death and resurrection if I do not make them my own in action?

Crossing this threshold from word to action will be different for each of us, depending on our gifts and circumstances, the concrete needs and challenges that present themselves to us. But our call will come from there. We will know it by its cost, for it will ask us for our whole mind, heart, soul and strength. We will know it from the joy it gives us, that God has found us worthy to be one with Jesus in the gift of ourselves.

Today’s short Gospel on the washing of the feet continues with the foretold betrayal of Jesus by Judas. We can only imagine the impact of Jesus’ humble action on Judas, already knowing he will later turn his master over to the Sanhedrin. He, too, was moved to act out his intentions, despite Jesus’ act of love. The fourth Gospel puts this betrayal to the fulfillment of the Scriptures. We do not know the full story, but it added to the disaster of this night of nights when Jesus accepted death that we might be offered eternal life with God.

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