Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Master, are you going to wash my feet?” (John 13:6).

Holy Thursday

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; *1 Cor 11:23-26*; *Jn 13:1-15*

The ritual of the washing of feet, as it is practiced in many parishes, is both a moving experience and one of the liturgy’s most teachable moments. Parishioners are invited to go to one of several stations where towels, basins and pitchers of water

are provided. Depending on where you fall in line, you will have your feet washed and then wash someone else's feet.

It might be a stranger, a spouse, a man or woman, adult or child. To meet others through their bare feet is to expose a common vulnerability – why we wear shoes and conceal our feet. Feet have their own stories, and it is often the case that it is much harder to let someone wash your feet than to be acting the role of the servant washer.

This common reaction helps us understand Peter's resistance to letting Jesus kneel before him to wash his feet. It is more than just embarrassment. Peter knows that what the Master is doing by acting as servant is an intimate lesson about the kind of leadership he expects from all his disciples, but especially Peter. He knew he was being baptized to a whole new level.

Ordinary authority is about taking control, being in charge, giving orders. Jesus is showing them another way. The one who leads is the one who surrenders himself to the needs of the community, who lays down his life for others, who sets the standard of humility and service for everyone.

Among the many in our churches who will take part in the foot washing ritual will be some everyone recognizes as those who nurture the community by their readiness to serve. Jesus points to them as models of the same love he had for his disciples. In other Scripture accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus will give himself to the community as food and drink, his own body and blood broken and poured out that we might have eternal life.

The liturgy is meant to form us in the image and likeness of Jesus. We come from these rituals prepared to be food for one another, servants within the community and to the world. It does not take a degree in theology or Bible studies to live this way. It takes only faith and the desire to be like Jesus.

The Last Supper will end as night descends on the world and fear seizes his disciples when they follow Jesus to the Mount of Olives. They will flee when their Master, who just hours earlier had washed their feet, is led away to be tried, tortured and executed. Each of them will go from ritual to reality as the implications of their commitment to Jesus becomes clearer. To rise with him they must also die with him.

Jesus looks up into each of our faces as he washes our feet. His look of love is an invitation to love others as he has loved us. We can turn away or we can accept this baptism that seals our commitment to see the story of Lent, Holy Week and the Triduum to its dramatic conclusion at the Easter Vigil. What we commemorate is what we are becoming.