

Washing of the Feet



REFLECTION

JOHN 13:1-16

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Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.' Simon Peter said, 'Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. 'In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him.

Reflection

In Jesus' time it was common practice to provide water for guests to wash their feet but not to do it oneself. Jesus and his disciples would have been reclining on cushions meaning that Jesus needed to go outside of the circle to wash their feet. In doing so Jesus violates the cultural boundaries. Jesus places himself in the position of a slave and an outsider, as this duty was not even required of Jewish slaves. The statement Jesus makes in doing this is that nothing is beneath us as servants, serving others often means going outside of our circle of comfort and standing beside people who are outcast by society. Serving others calls us to self-giving and self-forgetfulness. St Vincent wrote to a brother

Practice humility and patience; you need these two virtues to attain true charity, and they are also necessary for all who wish to serve Jesus Christ.

and in another place

...as soon as a heart is empty of self, God fills it. God remains and acts in it; and it's the desire for shame that empties us of ourselves; that's humility, holy humility.

Louise echoes such words when she said ...

All must be done with gentleness of heart and humility, as we consider the interests of those with whom we are working rather than our own or even those of the Company.

Humility is a necessary attitude for us to be true servants. We need to be willing to go the extra mile for the other even if this means that our needs become secondary. As St Vincent also reminds us "humility is the origin of all the good that we do.

Pope Francis echoed these ideas when he wrote...

The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: "You will be blessed if you do this" (Jn 13:17). An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.

At this time of year it is good for us to reflect on our service and how this attitude is present in all areas of our lives.