

Reflecting on Maundy Thursday



Archdiocese of
Liverpool



- **Light a candle or tealight.**
- **Play some music.**
- **Make yourself comfortable.**

On Holy Thursday we remember when Jesus celebrated the Passover feast for the last time with his friends. The emphasis on this day is two-fold, it's about **'Service' and 'Communion'** that we share in the life of Christ. When we consider the emphasis on service, we note that Jesus washed the feet of the apostles: it was a shock for the apostles because this was the role of the lowest of servants.

In John's Gospel we hear of the Washing of the Feet. **Read the Gospel now.** Take time to read it slowly and note which sentence or phrase strikes you. Read it again slowly pausing each time something speaks to you and reflect on what God might be saying to you through this phrase or sentence.

From the Gospel according to John 13:1-15



Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said

to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'

The Gospel of the Lord.



Fr Chris Thomas reflects...

I remember being at a conference some thirty-five years ago and meeting a woman who had with her a child who had both learning and physical difficulties. I watched as this woman looked after her daughter each day tending to her needs with the utmost care. If you can see love, I could see it during that week, shining in

her eyes. I learned as the week went on that this woman had to get up at 5.30am each day to make sure that her daughter was ready for breakfast at 8am.

She had to go through a complicated medical procedure which was what took much of the time, along with bathing and dressing. As the week went on, I learnt that the woman had adopted her daughter because she wanted the girl to experience love. There was a lot of letting go that had to happen within that woman for her to get to a place where her heart was big enough to do something that she did not have to do.

Richard Rohr the American Franciscan once wrote this: 'Eucharist in John's Gospel is not ritual or liturgy but suffering service'. That's what I saw in that woman. Rohr's understanding is one of the most challenging concepts to take on board in a church which loves to ritualise and dogmatise. This is not a bad thing to do because it leads us to deeper understanding but there is always more. We are always invited to go beyond the ritual and the dogma and ask ourselves the question, whose feet am I prepared to wash? Who am I prepared to lay down my life for? Where do I express in very practical ways what God in Jesus has done for me? I guess it could be summed up in the question, where do I love?

It seems to me that is the most important faith question that we have to ask. I think that we would grow a lot more in faith if we attempted to answer it rather than getting ourselves all hung up on what we usually call faith questions. Hung up on whether or not we've said our morning and night prayers. Hung up on whether we're going to hell or not. Hung up on our moral lives, or our moral standards or maybe other people's!

I'm not saying those questions aren't important, all I'm saying is that there is a deeper question that has to be asked. Is love at the core of my life? Or have I allowed myself to grow hard and selfish, refusing to respond to the needs of anyone who doesn't fit in with my understanding of people who are worthy of my care and presuming that religious practice is what faith is about.

I love the Eucharist but the purpose of receiving the Lord is to help us love more and to help us deal with those things in our hearts and minds that stop us loving. St Augustine is reported as saying 'We who are the body of Christ, receive the body of Christ to become more the body of Christ.' We are to become more like the Lord and Master we say we serve. That's what is so powerful about the Gospel on Maundy Thursday. John presumes that we know Jesus took bread and wine and shared himself with us. He wants to show us what that means by having Jesus get down on his knees and wash his disciples' feet.

Somehow, we have to get on our knees and serve the broken and the poor in this world. At this time of COVID -19 it is more imperative than ever. The listening ear, the ready smile, the open heart all speak of the presence of God to whoever we meet. That's the challenge of today, to love our brothers and sisters, whoever and whatever they may be, and so to feed a world that's hungry for love.



The Taizé chant 'Ubi caritas et amor' takes up the words of the traditional chant used on this day.

You may like to listen to this now.



Questions to ponder:

- What do you think it would have been like to suddenly have Jesus wash your feet?
- How do you think you are called to live this out?



Intercessions:

The Apostles were in the upper room:
we pray for our communities in this time when our church buildings are closed – may we be church for those around us.

Lord Jesus Christ we pray this in memory of you.

The Apostles gathered with Jesus to celebrate the feast of the Passover:
we pray for those who are alone at home, for those in isolation – may they know the love of Christ and may we, as community, support them in every way we can.

Lord Jesus Christ we pray this in memory of you.

Jesus washed the feet of the Apostles:
we pray for all doctors and nurses serving our community especially those working in hospitals – may they find strength and courage.

Lord Jesus Christ we pray this in memory of you.

Jesus took the bread and broke it saying do this in memory of me:

We pray that we may be eucharist for others, that our lives may be blessed, broken and shared for the people we are in contact with.

Lord Jesus Christ we pray this in memory of you.

We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.
Amen.