



EQSAINTS

Holy Thursday

Liturgical Text: The Washing of the Feet

10. After the Homily, where a pastoral reason suggests it, the Washing of Feet follows.

11. Those who have been chosen are led by the ministers to seats prepared in a suitable place. Then the Priest (removing his chasuble if necessary) goes to each one, and, with the help of the ministers, pours water over each one's feet and then dries them.

12. Meanwhile some of the following antiphons or other appropriate chants are sung.

ANTIPHON 7 *John 13:34*

I give you a new commandment,
that you love one another
as I have loved you, says the Lord.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later in the Bible when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Scripture Passage: John 13:1-20 and 31-35

Context:

The Holy Thursday liturgy is memorial of the night Jesus was betrayed. Before Jesus and his disciples went outside to a garden on the side of the Mt. of Olives, John's Gospel records two things that Jesus did while they were together in the Upper Room sharing a meal. On that night, Jesus instituted the Eucharist in the context of the meal. He gave to the Apostles and through them to the Church the ongoing way that people can have a living encounter with His Real Presence. Bread ceases to be bread and wine ceases to be wine. They become the actual body and blood of Christ. Day after day and week after week, the Church transcends time and space and it enters into this moment.

The second thing that Jesus did is wash the feet of disciples. He got up from the table in the middle of supper; he got a basin and water pitcher, and he started to wash the disciples. Then he very clearly stated his intentions. He says that he is giving a model for them to follow. What he is doing for them, they are being commanded to do for others. As Jesus continues through the night, he is not merely saying that they are supposed to get up in the middle of supper, get a water pitcher and basin, and start washing the feet of those at their table without warning. The washing of the feet that Jesus did is a prophetic sign that has deeper meaning. The washing of the feet

becomes a symbol of a new commandment, a *mandatum novum* in Latin. The new commandment is that as Jesus has loved us, we are to love one another.

If you and your members have Bibles, you can look up the references together.

Key New Testament Words and Phrases:

- *Love*: Found in verse John 13:34, the Greek word is “agapate” (ah-gah-PAH-te). The root word is “agape”, the highest form of love.
- *Reconcile*: Found in 1 Corinthians 5:18, the Greek word is “katallage” (kat-ah-LAHG-ay). It means to “change” and to “exchange”.
- *Emptied*: Found in Philippians 2:7, the Greek word is “ekenōsen” (eh-ken-NOH-sen). It is from the Greek root “kenos” and it means to be deprived of all content.
- *Being poured out*: Found in Philippians 2:17, the Greek word is “spendomai” (spen-DOH-my). It refers to an offering of wine that is poured over an altar. It is a complete sacrifice to God.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

When Jesus said to “love one another as I have loved you”, he had choices as to which word for “love” he could have used. His disciples and him traveled together, worked together, and ate together just like brothers would. Because of that, he could have used the word “philos” (FEE-lohs), the word for brotherly love. But that’s not the word he used. He said “agape”. It is the highest form of love. It is kind of love that is forever and not based on the other person fulfilling their end of an agreement. That means it is without condition. It means that he loves us no matter what. That means we are to love each other, no matter what. These are words the original audience would have heard, but Jesus wanted to go further. He wanted to demonstrate what he was talking about in a symbolic or prophetic way.

Jesus came to reconcile us to God and to reconcile us to one another. In Latin, the word reconciliation means to bring things eyelash to eyelash with each other. That is a beautiful understanding to what God has done, but the Greek word that has been translated as “reconciliation” is actually deeper than that. The word means “exchange”. To exchange in this sense of the word means to give something up in order to make room for another. For us to be reconciled to God, he gives something up to make room for us. This is how much he loved us.

To make room for us, he emptied himself. He poured himself out to the point that nothing was left. As Jesus poured out the water from the pitcher it was a symbol of him being emptied. Jesus and his disciples were all Jews and were used to the Jewish understanding of sacrifice. There were many sacrifices where the priest would eat part

of the animal that was burned as an offering to God. That is not the case with an offering of wine. It is poured over the altar and there is nothing left for any person to have. It is a complete offering. When Jesus is pouring the water out and washing the disciples feet, he is saying that there are to love without holding anything back. This is what “agape” is. It is 100%.

In families, siblings talk a lot about what is fair. “How many cookies are in the bag? Let’s count them out and make them fair, 50/50.” “You were in the bathroom for half an hour. Now I get half an hour.” Having things 50/50 certainly seem reasonable and fair. The love Jesus has for us cannot be described as “reasonable”. It is not reasonable to empty oneself. Yet, that is what he did. That is what he commanded us to do.

This kind of selfless love has to get lived out in real life and real life for many of us in our families. Many of us can give our last bite of food to a friend, but would also fight a sibling over the last cinnamon roll in the batch. To love as Jesus loved is not a 50/50 deal. It is 100% and 100% only.

Now you may lead a discussion using the following guide. Take time to seek reconciliation as a household. If you feel so inclined, have a bowl, a pitcher, and a towel ready to wash each others’ feet. This would not be the time to bring up ways that another person has neglected you. Instead, allow each person’s conscience and the Holy Spirit to bring up the areas in need of reconciliation.

Application to Real Life:

- On a scale from 1 -10, with 1 being the hardest thing you do and 10 being second nature to you, how easy is to live selflessly with those you live with.
- Is there a time that you can recall where you could have treated someone differently than you did?
- Is there someone that you need to be reconciled with in your house? If so, who and how can you be reconciled to them?
- Have you felt unconditional love from another person in your household? Can you tell that person when you saw that or felt that?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read John 13:1-20 and 31-35 for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

Lord Jesus, you commanded the disciples to love each unconditionally and you gave them a model to follow. Help us to imitate you. Help us to remember that our love for others begins here in our home. We pray all these things from Our Father through your name and in communion with the Holy Spirit. Amen.