

## Receiving the Fullness of His Love

Maundy Thursday makes one thing perfectly clear. It is God's faithfulness that makes us faithful. On this night of foot-washing and communion, we behold the full extent of God's love toward us.

Mercy takes on new meaning as Jesus grants us tokens of the cross that awaits Him. He washes away our filth; He feeds us with bread from heaven. Foreseeing our departure from Him, He grants us powerful assistance for our return.

In His faithful love, we see our unfaithfulness. Here we have a choice. In that gap between perfect love, and our own, our hearts either tenderize or toughen. We can fall forward into His mercy or flee His presence altogether.

Peter did not bolt. But he remained a slow learner. Just before the Passover meal, according to John 13, Jesus began to reveal "the full extent of His love" (v.1) by washing the disciple's feet. 'Maundy' Thursday is derived from the Latin "mandatum", referring to Jesus' mandate of the disciples to wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14).

Jesus came to Peter with basin and towel, ready to get low and cleanse his lowliest part. Feet in the Hebrew culture designated the most humble part of a person. Unlike today, feet were filthy as a result of hiking dirty roads in sandaled feet.

This washing is prophetic, a foreshadowing of Jesus' life being poured out on the cross. We glimpse the essence of that flood when at the crucifixion the soldier pierced His side, releasing "a sudden flow of blood and water." (Jn 19:34) That river alone has power to dissolve our deepest stains.

Foot-washing also foreshadows Paul's words about the less honorable aspects of the body of Christ. The Apostle writes to the shamed ones at Corinth who were being neglected by the sleek and the strong there: "Those parts of the body we think are less honorable we treat with special honor...God has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it." (1Cor 12: 22, 24)

Sometimes we don't need others to neglect or reject us. We are very capable of hating ourselves for the broken and dishonorable parts. Feet represent those parts, the untouchable zones, the parts least likely to succeed.

These are the dimensions of our humanity which smell, that are unruly, that we stub unto more of a stench. These are the areas that are dangerous, and that can cripple God's will for us unless they are properly attended.

That's why we are tempted to hide our bloody feet. And often do. The religious man will even use spiritual language and rationale as to why he should hide them. In most Christian cultures, we lead

out with our best foot forward, and may make Herculean efforts to conceal the club foot we drag behind.

Yet to deny foot-washing is to deny the very person of Jesus and His passion: the bloody God pouring out His life to remove the stench of sin. That involves God's body—His basin, if you will, meeting us at our least honorable. He who receives such washing welcomes Christ right where Christ most desires him.

'Foot-washing' best describes the ministry of Desert Stream and its many pools of Living Waters around the world. Set in churches, these provide a protected, powerful opportunity for one to lower his/her shameful parts into the 'mercy pool.'

But we must be ready. God is faithful to mirror back our lack of readiness for foot-washing, just as He did for Peter. Peter asked Jesus as He knelt down: "Are you going to wash my feet?" (v.6) Hearing His 'yes', Peter refused the offer: "No, You shall never wash my feet." (v.8)

The Rock, the doctor of the Church, refuses foot-washing as stubbornly as he refused Jesus' cross. Jesus replies simply: "Unless I wash you, you have no part of Me." (v.8)

Peter was not ready for the cross and its benefits. He had yet to surrender old religious notions. The zealot still wanted to protect Jesus from His passion. And from his own smelly feet! The two are profoundly related. Jesus broken body, releasing a flood of cleansing, corresponds to our human brokenness and its defilement. Peter wanted neither a broken God nor the revelation of his own brokenness.

Maybe Peter was not yet desperate, not enough anyway. The Rock had more bluster in him yet, more of that good carnal energy that champions the Savior yet refuses to get saved. He did not yet see Jesus clearly. He did not see himself clearly. The mercy that might have made him meek eluded him.

Yet Peter's time would come, and in the meantime, Jesus washes his feet. Jesus is patient; He waits for us, just as He waited for the time when its meaning would become clear to Peter.

### Eating the Cross

Foot-washing prepared the disciples for Passover. The meal itself, described in Matthew 26:20-28, is a continuation of Jesus revealing the full extent of His love. During this meal, Jesus prophesies that His body and blood would be given "for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51)

If foot-washing foretold cleansing from sin, then the bread (Jesus' broken body) and the cup (Jesus' shed blood) represent sustenance. Communion conveys the Real Presence of God indwelling the people of God. Its purpose? To fortify and empower the saints to become His

manifestation on earth.

The bread and cup release the essence of Christ Crucified to our hungry, thirsty souls. We ingest Christ, a fulfillment of John 6:35 when Jesus says: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry; He who believes in Me will never be thirsty." Jesus wants this meal to satisfy us deeply, to become a fulfillment of that verse.

In a way, communion is the means through which we most purely partake of the cross. We drink and eat of its fruit at the Lord's Table. Jesus said: "My flesh is real food, my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains, abides, and rests in Me, and I remain, rest, and abide in him." (Jn 6: 55, 56)

Communion also reminds us that we as Christians exist as far more than a group of highly individualized units; we are one beautiful broken unit partaking of a single loaf and cup. At the Lord's table, we sit together with Christ and His disciples as one body representing the worldwide communion of saints.

Around that table we fulfill the truth that "together with all the saints we are learning to grasp the height and width and depth and breadth of the love of Christ..." (Eph. 3:18)

The washing of feet prophesies the cleansing flood released at Calvary, the basin, His body on earth; the communion meal conveys the sustenance of Jesus' love made manifest on the cross. These are mercies unimagined, disorienting to our natural sensibilities, until Jesus reveals them to us.

The disciples struggled to grasp these mercies. Their feet washed, their stomachs full, they still did not yet see themselves clearly. Nor did they behold Christ and His purposes clearly. Yet His mercy prevails. He prophesies the falling away of those who had just partaken of His most tender and profound expressions of mercy.

"This very night you will all fall away because of Me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." (Matt. 26:31)

Amazing love. God prophesies restoration to His beloved betrayers before they violate Him. That is mercy: the all-knowing, all-seeing grace that knows our inability to be faithful and makes a way for us to fulfill our vows.

Blind Peter leads the blind. With typical bluster, he insists his response to Christ will be different than his wayward colleagues. Peter vows to go the distance.

"Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will," said Peter. "I tell you the truth," Jesus

answered. "This very night before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You." (Matt. 26: 33-35)

The Rock dies hard. Yet Mercy prevails; Jesus promises, in essence: 'I will meet you in your abandonment of Me. My merciful love toward you shall liberate your turning back to Me.'

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus in His unfailing love reveals our unfaithfulness. At the same time He bridges the gap with His most tender mercies, mercies that wash us and feed us.

'As You have shown us mercy, O God, in the desert places of our lives, would You show mercy to the beleaguered state of marriage in the USA? As the Perry vs. Schw. case wends its way to the National Supreme Court, prepare for Yourself a victory. We shall render to Caesar what is Caesar's but we shall prayerfully fight for what is Yours, O God. Prepare the hearts of each justice, especially Justice Anthony Kennedy, to uphold marriage according to Your merciful design. Remember mercy, O God.'