

## Reflection for Maundy Thursday

When some local men approached two of Jesus' disciples, they expressed their wish simply and directly. "Sir, we would see Jesus". When Jesus hears of this he begins to teach his friends about where his life is leading and what it will involve. Like the wheat seeds sown each year, his life will involve "losing it".

As followers of Jesus, who seek to see him more clearly and follow him more nearly and love him more dearly, in the words of the prayer of St Richard of Chichester, this Holy Week is an opportunity for us "to see Jesus" .... And the story of that last meal when Jesus shared with his disciples and he washed their feet, presents us with a picture, a video, of Jesus' life in action, its whole meaning captured in the events that made it up. Most clearly and subversively, in the fact that he, their Lord and master, enacted the part of a servant and washed their feet.

We miss the life-changing meaning of Jesus' life if we smooth over these subversive parables in action. Here Jesus initiates a new way of living with a new community in which surprisingly new, subversive norms will set the tone and guide the way. This newness is shocking because it turns our view, of how things are and should be, upside down. The Master - washing the feet of the disciples...! Imagine yourselves in their place . . . the one whose words you drink in, whose every gesture touches and inspires you, whose courageous challenging of the authorities awes and excites you . . . and there he is at your feet, with the towel round his waist, kneeling before you, and washing your feet, dirty from walking the dusty roads. How might any of us feel at this point . . .? Embarrassed, shocked, or deeply touched as his hands gentled our feet, as his eyes caught ours . . . This is not the cosy love that invites us to forget our worries but rather a turning upside down of our world to release us into something we had never imagined . . . and perhaps our tears flow at his turning things upside down this way, not over there but here including me, touching and changing me . . .

In this upside down reversal, we have a picture of the way Jesus, and through him, God, comes to us and to all people in such surprising ways. We had thought, the disciples later said, as they realised they had got it wrong, we had thought he would be the one to save Israel and the implication is by acts of power to overthrow the hated Romans perhaps...and we too have thought in similar fashion of how God will act, in some special, miraculous, dramatic way. Instead, he chooses *this* way to come to us and to show us *his way*. How appropriate that one of his later followers described her own following of Jesus as her "little way".

And so often, when we dream of how we shall follow or witness or serve, how often - I speak for myself at least- how often we dream of doing something wonderful, that will have a dramatic effect, really make a difference in the world. And the danger we become to those poor souls who -doing their best to follow our Lord-get in our way...! Tho' truth be told, the real danger is to ourselves. In such ways we feed our own egos. Fortunately, painfully, reality itself "gets in our way" and shows up our dreams for the empty fantasies they were. As they shatter, so we are brought low and find ourselves doing something that lacks the colour and drama we had dreamed of . . . but in this humble activity, so far beneath what we would have thought of doing before, we are brought close to our Lord as he draws close to us, and as the Samaritan, that outsider, drew close to the beaten up traveller.

This Maundy Thursday reminds us, then, that we need to let go of our dreams, and of our own wantings, as we witness our Lord washing his disciples' feet. Our following of him, our serving of him, begins, it seems, in our first receiving his gift of love to us. And what is that ? As he came to the waiting world at Christmas in the form of a homeless infant, so here he comes to us in the form of a servant. That washing of feet stands for so much in the way of cleansing and healing and tenderly caring - and if we have forgotten the importance of such acts of kindness, we shall learn just how precious they are when we find ourselves bereft in some way, through accident or sickness or loss of someone dear . . . it is simply amazing and wonderful how little acts of attention and consideration touch our hearts and help us rest.

How fitting, then, that one of the traditional songs of this time has the refrain, "Where charity and love are, there is God". Let our hearts and minds be cleansed from our petty worries, from our grand dreams, and may we see those around us who need those little gestures of support and attention that wash away the dust and weariness of the world and bring us "into his marvellous light" - a life of shared fellowship, where the usual barriers and divisions fall away, and a new communion is born out of the feeding on all he gives to those who come seeking. And may we, our eyes cleansed, recognise our fellow travellers and in those surprising and unglamorous seekers or people in need whom the good Lord sends our way. For "where charity and love are, there is God".

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