

Maundy Thursday

It was just before the Passover feast... the evening meal was being served... Jesus got up from the meal. Took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...

A few days before this meal, when Jesus was at supper in Bethany, he sat back, while Mary washed his feet and dried them with her hair.

And, this is a wonderful scene, in which we see a disciple honouring the teacher (honouring the master). But, again, in this meal – this last supper – we see Jesus turn everything upside down (we see a reversal).

It's Jesus who lifts the jug and the bowl – it's Jesus who kneels at the feet of the disciples (a profound moment – a gesture of love and service and self-sacrifice).

In these times of doubt and uncertainty, I think this is a very powerful reading. Our reading today – on this Maundy Thursday – reminds us that our most Loving God continues to bless us and care for us, often in unexpected ways. In the care and the concern that we see around us, we see the blessings of our God. In the care provided by doctors and nurses working in our hospitals – we see a God who continues to serve. In the care and consideration of those working in our nursing homes and aged care facilities, we see the grace and hospitality of our Lord. In the support networks and assistance offered to the unemployed, the sick and the disadvantaged (in Centrelink payments to the poor and tax-breaks for those with small businesses - in cheap prescriptions for the sick and extended trading hours for the elderly in our shopping centres) – in all of these unexpected blessings we see the grace of God.

On Maundy Thursday, we celebrate a God who comes to serve us – we see a God of reversals. And, in a way, today we are called to take our place in the life of God's grace – we too are called to serve others, as Christ was the servant of all.

I find it quite easy to accept what Jesus did, when I think about it in general terms. His actions, in washing the feet of the disciples, gives us a wonderful insight into the love of Christ – a life of service and humility that can help us to understand the kingdom of God. The symbolism is quite moving and thought provoking.

But, when I look at the people involved – when I start to name the disciples – it's then that I start to struggle.

I struggle when I think about Jesus washing the feet of Matthew. Matthew was a reformed man, but (in many ways) he was still far from perfect. He was a flawed man - a reformed tax-collector – worthy of suspicion and mistrust. He was an outcast - not welcome in the synagogue or at social gatherings.

And, there are many people like Matthew living in the world today – people that we are called to love and serve. Moving beyond suspicion and mistrust, we are called to love these people just as Christ loved Matthew.

I struggle when I think about Jesus washing the feet of Thomas – washing the feet of a man filled with doubts and disbelief. And, of course, the world is filled with people like Thomas – the cynics the knockers and the doubters. Following the example of our Lord, we are called to love and serve these people, as well.

Most of all, I struggle with this story when I think about Jesus kneeling in front of Judas. I struggle when I think about Jesus taking his feet in his hands with the same love that he offered to the others. (Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus and handed him over to be killed, is shown the same love and care.)

And yes, we are called to love and serve these troubled people as well – those who have no care or concern for us.

So, our reading today calls us in to the life of God's grace – to offer ourselves in service to those around us – especially in these difficult days. Our reading shows us that this life of service crosses boundaries (and we're seeing evidence of this in our hospitals, in our nursing homes, in our shopping centres and in our homes). Today, we're reminded that these acts of love and service are the true foundations of our families, our communities and our nation.

Imagine, if you can, Jesus kneeling at your feet. What does this love stir up within you? Today, we are reminded that this love comes to us in our human frailty. We are loved without condition, regardless of how we fail or fall short of the mark. And, we are called to share it – to pass it along to those around us.

Let us pray:

Lord, we can accept the thought of kneeling before the ones we love – those who love us in return. But, we struggle to serve those who are unsympathetic and different – the cynics and those who betray us.

Lord, teach us how to be more like you – teach us how to love the way you love. As we kneel before the cross, we pray that we will come to share your strength.

We offer our prayers to you, our teacher, guide and friend. Amen.