

TRIDUUM April 9, 2020
Holy Thursday – Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper

Readings:

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14

Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16BC, 17-18

1 COR 11:23-26

John 13:1-15

“Do you realize what I have done for you?
I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you,
you should also do.”

Two years ago, I had the chutzpa to change the long-standing foot-washing custom at Holy Trinity that had been adopted by Twelve Apostles. Boldly, I changed it there also. “Oh NO! What’s he doing?” “He’s going to ruin everything!” “Who does he think he is, he CAN’T do that!” “Things will never be the same!” “The audacity of that punk.” “He can’t tell us what to do!!” “Watch this end in disaster!!!”

I was urgently aware that what wasn’t spoken out loud from the lips of those filled with disdain and loathing for me, was mentally projected on the public big screen thought bubble that hung in the air like a pungent odor as foul as jackal dung.

I didn’t ask for permission, no. I didn’t seek approval, no. I didn’t include anyone in my decision, no. I didn’t preview my plot for criticism and revolt, no. The sacred liturgy of Holy Thursday didn’t need to be over thought, overworked, over processed, or over planned. Jesus showed us what to do. Simply put, all we needed to do was to “just do it!”

We only had one set of three benches. It belonged to Holy Trinity. We needed two. Twelve Apostles didn’t have their own. The wooden benches are quite nice. Honestly, anything else would have been inappropriate so I nixed every option. Twelve Apostles felt like they were behind the eight ball. No one wanted to transport these noteworthy benches from here to there and back here again. I got it! Between the two parishes there was a lot of talk.

No solutions. Just problems. I declared folding metal benches have no place in God’s house; stacking planks of wood on top of bricks or cement blocks had no place in God’s beautiful house, our place of worship. It didn’t seem holy or right or practical. I determined no benches, only one chair up in front, near the altar, at the appropriate time, for one person at a time, not an assembly line for God and everybody to see. Shameful!

To complicate matters even more, since I had the audacity to say no, all eyes pointed directly at the target on me, the priest, a Judas of the people, like I had spent far more than thirty pieces of silver. One chair cost nothing. I could feel heat coming at me from every direction, determined to burn the brand of failure into my soul as a reminder to God and everybody that I was wrong. I wasn’t.

I wasn’t afraid either. This wasn’t my first rodeo. It wasn’t my first shot at being on the big stage. I stopped being a novice long before I was ordained a priest. The Holy Spirit reminded me, “You know what to do, just do it.”

I remained calm, collected and resolved because the Holy Spirit came to me in prayer and said, “Steven, simplify things. Stay focused on what Jesus did and why he did it. Don’t let what people do or don’t do or what they have done or what they will do get in your way of following in the footsteps of Jesus, your best friend. Don’t let what people say you did or didn’t do or should have done get in your way either! You got this, and Jesus has got you. Just do it.”

So, I ask you, why did Jesus do it? Why did Jesus wash the feet of the apostles in the first place? Why did Jesus accommodate the apostles washing their worn, mishappen, gnarly looking feet when he knew full-well they would not have returned the favor? Why did Jesus turn the other cheek instead of retaliating when he was treated unfairly? Why did Jesus humble himself and take care of their needs when they in turn only wanted big accolades from each other? Why did Jesus serve them even when it was unpleasant? Why did Jesus put up with the worst of them and the best of them every day of his short earthly life? Why did Jesus take away their burdens only to have them turn on him and beat him and gossip about him, hurt him and kill him? Why did Jesus forgive them even when he knew they would never say, “I’m sorry?”

Why does Jesus do it again and again and again? People think our task is to figure out how Jesus went about washing the feet of the apostles. My dear friends, our task, quite frankly, and more importantly, is to figure out WHY Jesus did it, not how. Jesus didn’t line the apostles in a row and mechanically go through the motion of washing their feet in some affected gesture of reenactment. For Jesus, it was far more, it was personal. It was far more than pretend, or for show or for accolades. His love for them was real. My love for you is real.

Jesus didn’t ask for permission, no. Jesus didn’t get approval, no. Jesus wasn’t a people pleaser, no. Jesus didn’t qualify or quantify what he was doing before he did it, no. Jesus wasn’t a branch manager with a quota issued from on high that he had to meet or be replace and be fired. Jesus didn’t get a bonus for a job well-liked. Jesus wasn’t a compliant robot following orders and commands issued by every pharisaic near-do-well who thought they were in charge. None of that mattered to Jesus. None of that got in his way. None of that stopped Jesus. Love, simply put, is why Jesus did it. A greater love than self-love. Love one another, he commanded. “Remember,” Jesus said, “This is how you remain in my love.”

Jesus was his own person. Jesus was God’s own special creation. Jesus saw people and the world from a different angle. Jesus humbly took the apostles one by one, greeted them as his friends, smiled at them, embraced each of them as a brother and a sister, he loved them individually and collectively from the depth of his heart, he cared for them physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Jesus humbly knelt before each of them and he tenderly took one foot after another in his hands and gently washed their feet, their poor, tired, selfish, confused, soiled, grubby, messy, shoddy, nasty, sick, bent, crooked, lazy, shallow, dishonest, two-faced, deceitful feet, yearning to breathe free in their wretched existence.

Jesus lifted-up the worst of them. Jesus lifted-up the best of them. Jesus lifted-up all of them. Jesus washed their feet without considering what they did or didn’t do. Jesus washed their feet without holding on to what they had done to him, and what they would do to him.

Jesus focused on what’s most important, “so that what I have done for you, you should also do.” Why did he do it? Why does he do it again and again and again? We need to shift our focus. Jesus asks all of us, not just his ministerial priests, to be his hands and wash the feet of those around us, even the people we would say don’t deserve it. Here is why. We meet Jesus in

the dirty feet that we lower ourselves to clean. Jesus did it, he does it and he will do it, because Jesus loves each of us as God's own special creation. That's the priesthood of Jesus Christ in action. Thank you, Jesus, for seeing us and the world from a different angle.

This is what I have learned from Jesus. To wash the feet of others, figuratively and literally, is to forgive them even when they won't say I'm sorry. To wash the feet of others is to consider their needs as important as my own. To wash the feet of others is to do good to them even if they won't return the favor. To wash the feet of others is to love them even when they don't deserve my love. "Do you realize what I have done for you? I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Here's what really happened that Holy Thursday during the foot washing. I wish all of you could have been there. The gauntlet was lowered, the old guard went down. We all got it! We all got why Jesus did it in the first place. Tears streamed down my face. Tears streamed down the faces of those whose feet were washed. Tears streamed down the faces of all those who were there, watching, praying, receiving, gasping at how beautiful, how profound, how necessary. We were all lifted-up. The best of us, the worst of us, all of us.

Jesus was really, truly present, instituting the Holy Eucharist, establishing the ministerial priesthood, inaugurating fraternal charity. That's not something he did just for himself. That's something he did for all of us. That's not something we should do just for ourselves. It is what we all should do for others. Jesus did it for us. Why don't we just do it for other people?

Jesus gave his life so we might live. Just being alive isn't enough. We truly live when we live as Jesus lived. We must love. We must forgive. We must endure. We must not be afraid. We are God's own special creation. The end of something old can become a new beginning with God. It's time for us to see life from a different angle.

What our world needs now is more people washing the feet of others, not people who recoil in fear, holed-up with disdain and contempt. In the dark days ahead, let us all keep our eyes and ears, our hearts and minds focused on what Jesus is doing right now in our midst. This is not the end, it will be a new beginning if we all realize what Jesus did for us, and if we do what Jesus did. Not how, but WHY. God's got this! God's got us!

We adore you O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.