



Holy Thursday

An Expression of Love

Whenever someone visits our home, we usually offer them something to drink or eat. It's a sign of our hospitality and a way to make guests feel welcomed. During the times of Jesus, when the mode of transport was mostly by foot, people walked great distances arriving at their destination with dirty, aching feet. As a sign of hospitality, a host would see to it that weary guests could wash their feet to remove the dirt from the road and bring some relief to their sore feet. Washing a visitor's feet was a task usually reserved for servants in the home of the wealthy. In the case of the poor, water was given to guests so they would wash their own feet.

So it is understandable Peter would protest when his Lord and Teacher reached out to wash his feet. The disciples would have found it hard to accept such a gesture from Jesus. If anything, they should have been the ones washing the feet of Our Lord!

But on the final night the Lord spent with his disciples, he gave them an unforgettable lesson in love and humility by performing what was considered to be a lowly, although I am sure greatly appreciated, service. His action that night was another way of expressing God's infinite love for his children. Not only did Jesus wash the feet of these men—his disciples—he gave them a new mandate of love and forgiveness. The Lord also lovingly washed the feet of the man who would betray him, a fact he surely knew, yet it did not stop him from expressing love toward his traitor.

Every year on Holy Thursday, Catholics celebrate the evening with a ritual of the washing of feet: a symbolic gesture of love and humble service. But the mandate Jesus gave us, on his last day as a man, goes beyond the symbolic washing of feet we commemorate every year. Holy Thursday is a challenge for Christians to follow Jesus in his love, service, and generosity by washing one another's feet every day.

But how can we wash the feet of others in today's world, since we no longer welcome visitors with warm water and soap at the door? By serving those in our community who are in need of a helping hand, caring for those who suffer, and treating everyone with the dignity they serve, as children of God—regardless of their language, social, cultural, or economic status. We wash the feet of others when we forgive the hurt they caused us; visit the sick and elderly; welcome newcomers in our neighborhood or parish; volunteer to teach others; donate food for the church's or area's food pantry; or help our families and friends weather these tough economic times. This is how we kneel at the feet of others and bring them the same comfort and relief Jesus gave to his disciples.

FOR REFLECTION:

When was the last time you expressed love and comfort toward others? Do you serve your family, community, and parish?

(SR: Our Parish: Many Cultures, One Faith, March 2009, by Elizabeth Roman)