

Lord, "Take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you." Amen

Take just a moment, sit back, relax and close your eyes. Now, imagine that you have been invited to the last supper along with the 12 disciples. You are sitting on the floor and there in front of you is a low table or a cloth. As you sit there, you can feel tension and confusion as the disciples' banter about who should sit where and what is going to happen. You also feel the thick palpable undertone of discontent for Jesus emanating from outside the upper room.

It is not the picture we carry with us from paintings of the last supper, is it?

I wonder, as you are sitting there, do you feel fear? Are you a bit taken aback to be in this ancient setting so unfamiliar to you? Are you curious as to how the people present were chosen as one of the pioneering leaders of the New Testament Church? They are neither Rabbi nor scholar, nor do they possess any extraordinary skills; Yet, God chose each

of them - each of you - to carry out His exceptional plan.

And then, to make matters even more confusing, Jesus turns things upside down and washes your feet! The master washes the feet of his servant.

Would you say, as Peter did, "You will never wash my feet!"

How could we allow our beloved Jesus to do this? Yet, how could we not. Jesus is showing us that the transformative power of his love is most effective when turned into humble service. Tonight, Jesus tells us that "I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

Now, take a deep breath and come gently back to the here and now. As you open your eyes, ask yourself why, on this night - the night that commemorates the custom of the Eucharist, our Gospel is about foot washing? Shouldn't we perhaps be reading a passage from Matthew, Mark or Luke related to the bread and wine of the Last Supper. After all, isn't the Eucharist the start and finish of our journey?? Isn't it the place

to which we draw people and the center from which we are sent out to bring Christ to the world.

Absolutely, but isn't the Eucharist also the call to get our feet dirty?

Do you see any other way to reach all people without journeying through the dirt and mess of the world in which they live? You cannot love and keep your feet clean. You cannot love and save your own life. Sacrifice and abundance are bound together, they cannot be separated at any stage. Can they???

PAUSE

In my mind, all the many ways in which love serves others are included in the act of foot washing. For some people it literally means washing the feet of another - in hospitals, nursing homes, home care - here the tender service of washing one's feet actually happens. Yet in times of accidents, disasters, war, the daily trials of our weary world, it may mean washing away not just the dirt and tiredness of the day but dirt, blood, and sadness. It may mean binding and healing wounds, comforting the sorrowful, lending a

hand to the overburdened, helping out and being available. There is an infinite number of ways in which we can fulfil this command.

I am a Chaplain at our local hospital and last year at this time, I was called to the emergency room to minister to one of the young people shot at a local high school, and to be there for the battle-weary emergency room staff. I didn't wash anyone's feet or hands on this trying day, but rather *held* the hand of the shooter and prayed for him and his family, administered a blessing for his spirit at the time of his death, and touched the arms of those tending to him while offering a prayer of comfort, strength and courage. After the frantic pace died down, I leaned against the wall and prayed - for the students wounded, our community, our country, the hospital staff, the teachers and responders to the shooting...there were no feet or hands to wash, but I knew I could fulfill God's commandment to love all...even the young man - the shooter lying lifeless on the gurney.

Through His example, Jesus shows us that even our enemies are deserving of our love, not just through prayers, but through our actions. We can't say "I love you" in our minds and then not act on it. Yet, if we are to call ourselves Christians and to love our neighbors, as we love ourselves, then we are to love and touch our enemies enough to overcome whatever sets us at odds with each other.

If we are to open our hearts and hands, mustn't we be washed by Jesus, baptized into His death and resurrection. Are we not like kids who play in the mud? Haven't we grown accustomed to the dirt of our sin? Because we have, Jesus bends down to us in His humbled crucified humanity to wash us so we do not come to the table with dirty feet. He reaches down to the deeply soiled places in our lives, down to the soles of our feet, where we touch the earth from which we're made - the dirt to which we return. He reaches down to where the dirt of our earthly life is mulish and muddy. And He washes us clean!!

We must always remember what Jesus told Peter - "Unless I wash you, you have no share in me." We must learn to be filled with Jesus' Love, so His love flows through us to each other. In the washing of the feet,

Jesus peels away the things that stop us from living a life of Service - one that transforms the world with humble love. Jesus shows us that when we recognize Him in the Eucharist, we make Him truly present in our world and share His love to all by the simple act of washing feet. It is the simple acts of service that make Jesus real.

Earlier, when you were sitting at the last supper in your mind, did it seem like a big deal to you that Jesus was going to wash your feet. I always feel a bit nervous and embarrassed when someone washes my feet! I'm not sure I would want Jesus to wash my feet - and for that matter would I be able to wash the feet of the person who was going to betray me.

How do you feel about this?

PAUSE

It was such a powerful act, for Him to wash the feet of Judas. It took perfect love to do this, and Jesus is what love looks like alive and breathing. This is not love as we see it today, a mere emotion, but true love - an act of love and forgiveness.

Can you show this kind of love to your enemies?

PAUSE

The question tonight is this: are you willing to take off the garments that hide you - to strip the layers that cover you? It may be a layer of privilege or pride, jealousy or anger, selfishness, laziness or greed. Whatever your "*it*" is, can you lay it down and replace it with the cloak of Service?

When we do, when we take off the layers that keep us protected from what we fear, or hate, then all things are possible - in and through God. Someone once said, "When we are young, we think we can change the world by sheer force of will. We march for our causes, speak out to be heard, protest and write letters, but as we grow spiritually we may realize that the way to change the world is to put down our placards and pick-up a towel and basin.

When you go home tonight, look into a mirror. Who do you see? Do you see your image only, or do you see your own image reflected in the face of Jesus? His image reflected in your life should become that mirror for the world, reflecting the face of Christ to all who see your face. Reflect Christ through your own

humble, simple acts of service to one another. Follow Jesus' simple command to love one another.

Jesus is real! Let us be filled once again with the real and abiding presence of Christ here tonight and let us become his Real and Abiding Presence in our world. Let us become like Him, washers of feet.

PAUSE

May God give you peace and courage to do His will.