

**Holy Thursday
(Apr. 1, 2010)**

Become Eucharist for Others

A number of years ago I was visiting a parishioner in the VA Hospital in Baltimore. As I entered the ward to see my parishioner a young man with a bandaged head came up and threw his arms around me in a great bear hug. Somewhat startled I said, “Well, I’m glad to see you, too.” He replied, “Father I make it my solemn duty to let people know I love them. In Vietnam I saw so much violence, so many things I wouldn’t want to tell you about. I saw my best buddy blown apart, and I became convinced that there had to be a better way to solve the world’s problems, so ever since then I’ve been giving most people I meet a big hug, hoping people will catch on and begin to realize that violence and war are not the answer, that it’s really all about love.”

I can’t help but feel as I recall this incident that it was that young man’s way of washing feet. I later learned that when he was released from the hospital he became part of the Catholic Worker movement and continued to wash feet, sometimes even literally.

Traditionally we say that Jesus’ foot-washing is a call to service, and I’m sure that’s true, but like so much in John’s Gospel I wonder if there is not more than that going on here. Both the act itself and the context in which it occurs suggest to me at least that this is a more radical call to discipleship than we might usually think. The act itself: it’s counter-cultural. A master would not kneel before a disciple to wash his or her feet. The context: it’s the night before Jesus dies on the cross. In the following passages of the Gospel Jesus will say, “Love one another as I have loved you.” As I have loved you. Jesus loved us to death – literally. So what he is telling the disciples – and us, as well – is that if we wish to follow him we must be willing to die for one another.

Now this is asking a great deal – more than we are capable of on our own – something we can only do with the grace of God. And what are the implications here? If we only took Jesus seriously, if all the people who profess to be Christians were truly serious about it, then many, if not most,

of the problems that this weary world of ours is facing would disappear. We would not have to worry about poverty, hunger, or homelessness. War and violence might not disappear but there would be much less than there is right now. Health care would not be an issue. We would take care of everyone who needed care. That, I think, is the meaning of foot-washing.

The challenge for us tonight is to ask ourselves how God is calling all of us to wash feet. What changes must we make in our own lives? What changes must we help to make in our world so that people will know we love them, that God loves them, and that that is a better way than hatred and violence. By ourselves of course there is little we can do, but together we can do a lot. Our liturgy reminds us of that.

In a moment we will re-enact this gesture here in our church. Fr. Horak will wash the feet of 12 people and then those 12 will go throughout the church and wash the feet of others. Be warned, my friends. This is not an act to be undertaken lightly. It is very, very serious. It is not just a ritual. It is a commitment, a commitment to be the kind of person Jesus has asked us to be, a public statement that you are willing to die for love, not just love of Jesus, but love of one another, of all of us.

I think this is really what every Eucharist is all about. And how fortunate we are tonight to hear words from Scripture to remind us of this, to perform gestures that symbolize it, that express our solidarity in Christ, not only washing feet, but later turning to one another and saying "The peace of Christ be with you," then walking together, together to the altar to share the one bread and the one cup that make us the one body of Christ. And then, again together, going forth from this place, carrying with us the gift we have received and sharing it with others, washing feet, being Eucharist for one another and for the world.