

Maundy Thursday, Yr B; April 13, 2006; *Exodus 12: 1-14a; Psalm 78: 14-20, 23-25; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (27-32); John 13: 1-15 or Luke 22: 14-30*

Let's get this out of the way immediately—how many of you feel the awkward moment when you see it is time to remove your shoes and have your feet washed? For me it is that moment when I suddenly feel very vulnerable. Foolishly I wonder, did I remember to clip my toenails, did I wash my feet, did I wear socks that will discolor my feet and leave them looking dirty, do my feet smell and will the person who washes my feet be certain they don't do that again next year? I suspect I am not alone in these wonderings.

The truth is that it takes time for us to be comfortable and not to feel vulnerable when we are asked to remove our shoes in front of people for the sole expression of having someone, maybe even a stranger wash them for us. It is perfectly normal in a society that is so well tuned to holding back a certain portion of ourselves from public scrutiny. It is not so much that we mind taking our shoes off, it is the fact that they become the focal point of the liturgy. Most often we like not having to wear shoes, many take their shoes off the minute they get home, it gives us a sense of freedom, a time when we are able to allow the air to circulate around our sore and tired feet, freedom to feel the ground beneath us without any encumbrances., a moment for us to be real. It is a moment for both the Judas in us and the Mary in us to merge at the foot of the Lord, as he cleanses us for the work ahead.

The symbolism of this night holds a mystic that must be experienced; it is not something that you can tell your friends and family about without it sounding a bit on the weird side. It is something that you must attend to. We arrive to begin a night of powerful movements and actions in our faith journey. We come knowing we will be moved by what we will experience. We come not because we find joy in being here, we come because it is real, it is so holy we can't not be here!

We come because we desire to be a part of this miracle, most especially the parts that are the darkest, the parts that will help us to intellectually and heart fully understand what it was that Jesus did for us and desires for us. We come because we desire to arrive at Easter knowing and appreciating how much God loves us and to what extent God would go to ensure we would one day again be reunited with the One who created us.

So we come, we remove our shoes and bear our feet, with all of their flaws and all of their beauty for the steps we have walked and the steps we will walk as we journey with Jesus through the dark days ahead. We come to feel cleansed; we come to minister to others by washing their feet. We come to understand we too are disciples. Disciples who are asked to be open and vulnerable to all God has for us to do, to be open to allowing others to minister to us as well.

We come to spend that final fate filled evening with our Lord; to hear his final teaching before being taken to the cross. We come to be present when Jesus instituted the meal of remembrance and shared that final meal with his disciples. We come to Gethsemane with Jesus to wait, to pray, to reminisce, to search our own hearts for strength and courage to be able to bear ourselves to the world in a way that exposes our deepest selves.

Tonight when we remove our shoes in preparation for the foot washing ceremony let's not focus on our fears of seeing the forbidden foot, let's focus on how we are

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symbolically showing Jesus we are willing to risk to be a disciple, willing to risk being vulnerable, willing to be open to the work he has for us tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. Let us think about how we are showing Jesus how we desire nothing to come between our relationship with him and the experiences he has for us. Let us remember our baptism as we feel the sensation of the water being washed over our tired feet, renewing us for the journey, cleansing us from all that inhibits us and washing us in the Holy Spirit for the days ahead.

When this service concludes this magnificent holy space will be barren, stripped of all of the icons, the vessels, the reminders of the beauty of our faith. We will be left with the reminder of what our world would be like without God. We will be reminded of the sadness of what humanity is capable of and we will feel the pain of this night and maybe, just maybe have a small idea what a lonely feeling it must have been for Jesus to be left all alone, deserted by his friends, condemned by those whom he loved, humiliated by those who desired only empty power. The compassion in our hearts will be kindled, the shame in our actions will be revisited and ultimately the feeling of true redemption will be the beginning of a new journey with our Lord come Easter morning. A true sense of resurrection—being risen once again to new life, a new start, given a new chance to embrace our faith in a new and enlightened way.

I share this story with you:

As the Master grew old and infirm, the disciples begged him not to die. Said the Master, “If I do not go, how would you ever see?”

“What is it we fail to see when you are with us?” they asked.

But the Master would not say.

When the moment of his death was near, they said, “What is it we will see when you are gone?”

With a twinkle in his eye, the Master said, “All I did was sit on the riverbank handing out river water. After I’m gone, I trust you will notice the river?”

Jesus wants us to notice the rivers in our lives, to be fully aware of the larger picture and to remember it is essential that we be present for this night in order to tend to the river that is left for us...

Amen