

Homily for
Holy Thursday
Preached by Fr. Brendan Freeman
(April 5, 2012)

[Scripture Readings: Ex 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Jn 13:1-15]

Every year in the Catholic world we have the ceremony of foot washing on this day. If we had it every day or like we used to do Trappist monasteries, every Saturday evening, it would lose some of its effectiveness to impress us. After Jesus washed the feet of his disciples he said to them, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." And so we do.

In our modern world this action seems out of place however it is not the act itself that is most important here it is the attitude that is important. Washing someone's feet is not a very glamorous thing to do. The feet after all are at the bottom of glamour scale. We think the face is more significant and in the face the eyes are considered windows into the soul. There are any number of poems written about the eyes but I wonder are there any about the feet!

What is Jesus trying to tell us by washing his disciples' feet and how is this connected with the Eucharist which he just instituted at the supper? I think we have to see this in the context of other examples Jesus gave us. He was the recognized leader of the twelve but he never accepted that as a power position as other religious leader did. He said the greatest must be the least, and the last shall be first, and he has come among them as one who serves. He called blessed the poor and the meek and those who hunger for justice, he touched Lepers and healed the blind and lame. He was a man for the poor. He really upset the social order of the day and this led to his death. The Jewish leader understood very well that if he continued they would lose their power. A few days before he was arrested they held a meeting of the Sanhedrin and proclaimed that if he was not stopped, "the Romans will take our land and our nation." Caiaphas, the high priest, gave them an out when he said it is better for one person to die than the whole nation parish. John expands this by saying not only the nation but all the scattered children of God. But what Caiaphas said was his death sentence no matter what false witnesses brought to the trial. The real and immediate reason was that the leaders were going to lose their power. I think it is safe to say Jesus died because his social teachings and examples were about to reverse the order of social justice established by the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Remember Jesus was crucified between two revolutionaries or as one translation had it insurgents. Jesus was really put to death because his teachings were revolutionary and they still are. Washing someone's feet is about as lowly a chore you can do and yet it is the attitude that is important here. Jesus wants his followers to have the attitude of servers, ones who serve others more than themselves. If I am your Lord and Master, he said, and washed your feet you

should do likewise. John tells us this action took place during the last supper so it was not just tacked on as it were. It is a moment in the Eucharistic mystery. The goal of the Eucharist after all is the unity of the body of Christ or as John says, gathering together the scattered children of God. Serving others is a Eucharistic act. It is a dying and rising. In fact we are in an Eucharistic school—a school of the Lord's service where we put into practice the teachings of Jesus. It is a learning by doing. Every time we serve one another we are strengthening the bonds of unity in the Body of Christ and fulfilling the purpose of the Eucharist.