



Society of the Sacred Heart™
United States – Canada

Holy Thursday 2021

Dear RSCJ and Sacred Heart Family,

Happy Holy Thursday, the beginning of our holiest days!

Holy Thursday is my favorite day of the year. This is the day that sanctifies everything – food and drink, friendship and community, suffering even of betrayal, commitment and service, life and death. It is the day when Jesus tells his friends how much he trusts them and loves them even more by his actions than by his words. In the gift of bread and wine, his own body and blood, he tells us that he wants to be with us forever, that he wants to continue to nourish us and he wants us continually to receive his love and his energy. What an amazing, imaginative gift – to find in the ordinary realities of everyday life a way to sustain memory and relationship. “Do this in memory of me.”

This year I am especially struck by the washing of the feet, so beautifully depicted in John’s Gospel. While we are so aware of the need to eradicate our implicit biases, and of the fragility of human life, and of the dignity and respect we owe one another, and while we are so immersed in pondering the use and abuse of power, Jesus takes an extraordinary action that is pregnant with meaning.

We often see the washing of the feet as the ultimate act of service. Today reflecting on our challenging times, I find even more to ponder. My reflections are not so much centered on the ritual act of foot washing, but on the reality of kneeling before another human being – already an act that speaks of the dignity of another person and the respect that is due each one – and cradling the dirty, dusty feet that have been making life’s daily journey. It is hard for us to imagine the reality of dirty feet, I think, since ours are so well protected and pristine, hidden from the task of walking and running by socks and shoes and boots. Sandals probably tell it best, though walking on cement still shields us from the dust and dirt. In the act of washing his friends’ feet Jesus equalizes everyone. He washes Judas’s feet even while he reminds Peter that this act of uncommon humility is necessary if Peter is to be one with him. Jesus trusts Peter and the others – probably even some unnamed women – to receive their cleansing from him. When he encounters Peter’s resistance he speaks the truth: if you do not let me do this for you, you will not be able to embody my message. In this humble gesture, Peter entrusts his feet to Jesus and Jesus entrusts his mission to Peter and to us. It is an act of service, and an act of tender love. Did Peter and the others ever think of their feet in the same way again, once they had been cleansed and consecrated by Jesus? Did they understand that as Jesus humbled himself before them, soothed and cradled their feet, he was giving himself in yet another way – as I have done this for you, so you also do? Walk my walk. The mission is your journey now. I trust you to carry it forward every step of the way.

In this simple, most intimate act of washing feet, Jesus shows us the way to revere the “other.”



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A friend of mine says that the prophetic word for us in these days is really, "What would it be like if we could find our way to overcoming our fear of the other?" I think in washing each one's feet Jesus is showing us that his way is to respect and reverence the other. He invites us to let go of our resistance and recognize and love the humanity we share. When we really do this, follow Jesus' model, surely we will have found the path to justice.

May this Holy Thursday awaken us to deep gratitude for all the gifts we are given, especially for the gift of the One who is the Light and Hope of our blessed and broken world. Let this be our hope and our truth. Amen.

With love,

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