

Holy Thursday, March 29, 2018

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalms 116:12-13, 15-16BC, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15



by Sr. Janet M Ryan, OSF

Several years ago I lived in a L'Arche community in Clinton, Iowa and attended Holy Thursday Mass with David, one of my beloved housemates. David was a man in his 60's with Down syndrome and had said yes to the invitation to have his feet washed at the service.



In the silence of the church, as the priest approached us sitting in the aisle, David said with excitement, "Hi Father," followed loudly by, "What's your name?" Our names are so important! David wanted to connect with the priest. The priest answered, "Tony." "Hi Tony! I'm David."

When the cool water was poured over his feet, David laughed and exclaimed, "Its cold!" The priest nodded in agreement, apologized and dried his foot. David then proceeded to take off his other shoe and sock, despite the instructions given us, that only one foot would be washed. "You want me to wash the other one too, the priest asked? "Uh huh," David affirmed. When both feet were washed, David smiled broadly, hugged the priest, gave him a kiss on the cheek and said, "Thank you, Father."

After Mass a woman approached and told me she was moved to tears by David's interaction with the priest. She said despite being in the back and not being able to see, she had heard every word.

In my heart and mind, David beautifully embodied the humility of Christ that evening. He entered more fully into the sacred ritual of the washing of the feet than anyone I have ever witnessed -and we did a lot of foot-washing rituals in L'Arche! Like Peter, who wanted his hands and head washed in addition to his feet (Jn 13:9), David wasn't satisfied with just one foot being washed. He wanted more! He was all in. He opened himself fully, vulnerably to the hospitality and kindness of the priest and responded with deep gratitude. Do we have that courage and humility?

Christ calls us to wash one another's feet, to enter into the vulnerability and humanity of the other. This means reaching out to those around us who are in need and entering into their need. Are we courageous enough to do this? Are we humble enough to allow others into our brokenness, vulnerability, and need?

Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet was a profound and uncomfortable gesture for the disciples. Peter initially refused, "You will never wash my feet!" (Jn 13:8) May we pray for the courage, grace, and humility to say 'yes' to washing each other's feet.

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