

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2020

There is a phrase that I often hear said by people who are trying hard to justify themselves after committing certain actions or saying certain things that lack charity, or want to pursue a certain path that may be self-diminishing; and that is, "I just want to be true to myself." The perfect response I heard to this was given by a Benedictine monk, who, on hearing it being said replied, "If you really want to do something really courageous and admirable try being true to someone better than yourself, like, say Jesus."

Being true to the person of Jesus is all about being formed by his example of sacrificial love and being moulded into an ever deeper likeness of that love. St Augustine once wrote, "The greater the measure in which love dwells in a man, the better is the man in whom it dwells. For when there is a question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes but what he loves. For the man who loves aright no doubt believes and hopes aright."

On this holy night when we begin the Sacred Triduum, the holy three days of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection, we are invited to share in two very precious moments that convey the depth of love that Jesus has for his people. The measure of his love in the actions of foot washing and the giving of himself in the bread and wine of that first Eucharist have been playing out since his birth, and will culminate in his death on the cross, for in these two actions tonight we see Jesus as all love. John tells us that God is love and that love is lavished upon us in its entirety through tonight's actions.

The foot washing and the institution of the Eucharist, these tokens of sublime love are summed up in that phrase that we hear at every Eucharist but tonight we hear as if for the first time, "This is my body." Firstly the foot washing. This is not the first action that Jesus has performed actions of love, that he has used his body, given himself totally for the love of people. He has used his hands to bless, to cure and to cast out demons. He has used his feet to travel the dusty roads in the cause of making his Father's Kingdom known. He has used his eyes to look with compassion and to weep in mourning. He has used his breath even his spittle to bring about sight and health, and now tonight he focuses his

love and uses his body as that of a servant. He girds himself with a towel and does what only a servant should do; washes feet.

We have witnessed many actions over the past weeks, of people offering their bodies, their actions, as those of a servant; Key workers in the NHS, commerce, industry. Children doing little acts of kindness, neighbours looking out for one another and all in the name of a love that seeks to serve. On a scale of great deeds, foot washing in any ordinary sense isn't up there with some other acts of service that we might think about, but as Saint Mother Teresa was fond of saying, "There are no great deeds, only small deeds done with great love." The many small deeds that people have done for each other during this world's crisis are examples of service and therefore love. It is this service that brings us close to the heart of Jesus, and to his command of love one another as I have loved you.

And then secondly and again the phrase, "This is my body," only this time it is with reference to ordinary bread and wine, but no longer so ordinary when viewed from the perspective of the sacrifice of the cross. These tokens given that we may have complete union with him, that we might live in him and he in us, are the gifts that enable us to be better than we are, to be true to Him and not anything we can ever conjure up by and for ourselves. This is the food of holiness and our transformation towards that love that makes us like him. And like the foot washing, his body is given to us in this way that we might love one another as he loves.

And in this sacrifice that begins at a wooden table and ends on a wooden cross, how are we meant to love? Foot washing requires us to love like servants, participating in his sacrifice requires us to love the devout, our brothers and sisters in the faith, yes. But look again at Golgotha, we are also to love the careless, the mockers, the ones that hurt us, the ones that ignore us, our enemies. At the cross were enemies, sinners and saints, and Jesus loved them all.

Tonight we enter into a new contract, we are to go forward and love one another as Jesus loves. We do so as members of his servant body, doing deeds of service in the manner of Jesus the servant and also as members of his sacrificial body, that being fed by his precious body and blood we love the

enemies, the sinners and the saints just as he did. What we see Jesus doing tonight is the culmination of his life and ministry, all the rest we try to grapple with in our journey to be faithful Christians is just commentary on these two actions. Don't be true to yourselves; be true to someone better than yourself, Jesus.

Amen.