

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, May 11th 2017

I once heard a man speak of growing up in a church that regularly practiced foot washing. The congregation met on a Sunday night and everyone took off one shoe and they washed each other's feet. He said that one Sunday afternoon, as his dad slept, he thought it a great idea to take some of the soot from the fireplace and place it in his dad's cowboy boots. His dad usually wore white socks. He put on his boots without expecting that anything had been placed within them and, when he took them off at the foot washing service, well – what a surprise. The man recounting this story from his youth said, "I never got a harder whuppin'."

Those of us who attend the Holy Thursday Mass during Holy Week see feet being washed by the priest. Perhaps you have even had your feet washed. Once I was asked to do it and, upon telling my wife of this honor, she recoiled in horror. "You are going to expose your gnarly feet with those black toe nails? For God's sake, curl your toes underneath just before and after they are washed and get your socks back on as fast as possible. We don't want to scare the children!" So much for the sublimity of the moment.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. They lived in a time when the roads were dusty and people wore sandals. So, upon entering a house, you needed to wash your feet. Wealthy families gave this job to a slave. Jesus, taking the role of a slave, washed their feet and then said:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it."

Do what? Wash the feet of others. Jesus says that we will be blessed if we do this.

Why in the world would I want to do that? Again, Jesus emphasizes that in our relationship to Jesus we are as slaves to their Master or messengers to one who sent us. So, why would I want to wash someone's feet? Because Jesus did and I am his disciple. Perhaps we have heard this so often that we take all of this for granted but I am not sure that we should.

How do I wash someone's feet? People in Jesus' day would laugh at that question but, since our roads and shoes are different, it's a legitimate question. We do not literally do this anymore. But we still do it. My father and mother washed my feet in a thousand different ways. The waiter or waitress at the restaurant who make us comfortable and wait on us wash our feet. Anybody who serves others does the same.

So, how do I do it? What do I do to show hospitality to others? Jesus says that I will be blessed if I do this. In my little world there appear to be hundreds of ways to do this every day. I am calling on Jesus to help me to see those ways, to follow him in serving others, and to receive the blessing of service.