

## Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 15th 2018

Maundy Thursday is the last official day of Lent. “Maundy” comes from the Latin term, “mandatum” -“command” -which Jesus uses in commanding the Apostles to wash each others feet as He has done. (John, 13,14-15) We call this day, “Holy Thursday”. It is the liturgy of the washing of feet. Today, the day after Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, we could also say is Washing Thursday, the day we wash our faces, removing ashes from our foreheads.

Perhaps a word about Lent is in order. Simply put, those who are in the Eucharistic Community through their having been baptized, are invited to reflect on just how they are living their baptismal identity and the mission they have received through their reception of the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Now why would they do that? At the Easter Vigil, those who are to be welcomed into the community and their new lives will obviously expect that their new community members are living well the life of their baptisms. Put even more simply, Lent is a very short time to do the spiritual-house-cleaning so that those who will enter our Church will not be so disappointed in us. Lent is about personal interior coming-to-life and how that life is lived within the relationships within and outside the community.

This coming to life, choosing life is the theme of our First Reading. The way which God has been laying out in the Chapters of Deuteronomy are “laws” in one sense, but invitations to live gratefully for and within the goodness of God. Sin then, is not the breaking of this law or that, but the violation of our being grateful, by trying to not choose “life”, but death to the relationship with the generous God.

The Gospel we hear today has also the theme of losing or gaining “life.” Jesus reflects upon how He is choosing life by living His identity and by living that way He will suffer, experience a suffering death, but rise. To His followers He offers them a similar invitation.

Winning, losing, gaining, forfeiting are frightening terms when applied to “life.” Here is the Lenten call. “Life” is a gift which is not gained or won. At our reception of the Eucharist we are celebrating our poverty with empty, open hands. What a dramatic gesture. What is even more dramatic is that Jesus enters that poverty and invites us to take It in for “life” and live all the moments of our days in generous gratitude.

The relationship which God initiates, God sustains and we extend through living gratefully. This is the New Law, relating gratefully, generously, and universally. It is this way of “life” to which Lent reminds us and to which those entering the Church at the Easter Vigil are hoping to experience within them and around them. So we wash our faces this morning as a gesture of purpose. We wash away the ashiness of our lives, how temporary our lives are and with brightness of heart, not sadness, we enter, (as we pray in the First Preface for Lent) “this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. You give us a spirit of loving reverence for You, our Father, and of willing service to our neighbor.” Be gentle in the washing.

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