

April 6, 2023



WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one...This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the Lord....

EXODUS 12:1-4, 11

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.... So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.... So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

JOHN 13:3-5, 12-15

Reflection

The celebration of the Lord's Supper has had a lengthy and varied evolution since the 4th century, growing in significance and nuance among a number of Christian denominations. In the Roman Catholic tradition, this mass emphasizes three essential elements: establishing the Eucharist, founding the ministerial priesthood, and pronouncing the commandment of brotherly love. The Last Supper manifests the tradition of the Passover of God during the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt as a sign that they are to be freed and the Egyptians grievously punished. Devout Jews celebrate the Passover Seder every year, as do Jesus and the disciples. The Eucharist symbolizes the ritual of faith they share on the night before the Passion begins. Passover bread is unleavened, representing the food gathered in haste before the flight from Egypt, and the wine signifies the stages of God's liberating presence among the Jews. The meal confirms the salvific work of God throughout history, as memorialized in the Book of Exodus.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he relates how Jesus reinterprets the Passover rite as a symbol of a new Covenant sacrifice in his own body and blood. The ancient ritual is transformed into a perpetual remembrance of God's

promise in Jesus, and a reminder that the community waits in faith for his return. The history of Exodus and the profession of the early Christians stand as a timeless affirmation of lives sheltered in the loving protection of God.

The Gospel of John includes a profound addition that is not narrated in the Old Testament history. The Jewish communities primarily lived in arid lands, and travelled in sandals or barefoot. As a result, foot-washing became a universal practice, in families, social groups, and religious gatherings—a gesture of hospitality, respect, and a process of cleanliness in keeping with purity laws. However, Jesus inserted the observance into the midst of the Passover meal itself. What had been a gesture of gracious care and welcome suddenly became the symbol of brotherly love which Jesus molded into the very nature of his new community, his ‘church.’ All held equal stature. As Jesus explained: **“If I, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.”** The Passover joined the people to their origins, and Jesus created a new covenant of familial love that mirrored the very love of the God who had called them together.

As we explore the foundations and covenants of our own religious families, we are invited to plumb the riches of the rites and stories that are the roots of our traditions. Jesus’ miraculous creation of a ritual of *agape* love opens a great vista for our future growth in faith. The Washing of the Feet marks a new horizon in which ‘religion’ becomes a source of spiritual freedom, leading us beyond our forms and doctrines to a common spirit of love and self-giving, to one another and the world.



For Pondering

- What foundational beliefs and practices draw you most deeply into your own religious tradition?
- Are there elements in your faith community that you feel need to be adapted or removed?
- Is there an experience in your own spiritual walk that offered you a 'Washing of the Feet' moment?

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