

## **Maundy Thursday Sermon 2023 evening mass**

*Exodus 12,1-8, 11-14, 1 Cor 11:23-26, John 13.1-15*

Service is at the heart of tonight's liturgy. Normally, in Jesus' time, a slave would be ordered to wash the feet of guests it tells us much that Jesus chose to perform this humiliating act of service himself.

It is a word that we use much in our society and yet it can sometimes have a hollow and even jarring resonance. We have the Emergency services, the National Health Service, the civil service and military service. Soon too we will have the Coronation of King Charles who will be anointed as servant of all of us. His coronation is a religious act not just political or social theatre. It should evoke Jesus' claim to power which confused the disciples, because he used his power to perform an act of service. And it should beg us question how we view power not least how we serve with whatever powers we may possess and how we serve each other in our society.

Many of our national and local services are clearly in need of reform and we have witnessed too many cases where the management seems to serve the institution before people and individuals within them serve self or distorted motive before the high ideals of each of those services. However we should always hold in our minds when rightly angered or betrayed that most people most of the time called to these services do try to serve with their best. But it is also worth remembering that it wasn't just Judas who betrayed Jesus and we all do so at some point and in some way.

Peter was reluctant to have Jesus wash his dirty feet. It was demeaning. Peter's feet are of course a metaphor for our dirty secrets we'd rather withhold even from God. They are a metaphor too for our reluctance to receive another's efforts and kindness with grace and acceptance of our dependence on others.

One by one, Jesus kneels in front of each disciple. The water of his love washes over the feet of each disciple - no one is left out including Judas and Peter. All are washed and loved. In this way tonight's liturgy puts a choice before us like no other in the church year. The choice is about making ourselves vulnerable and open to a particular unlimited love. Probably its challenging than many of us are comfortable with. Most occasions we come with a certain ease to sing, pray and receive communion. Perhaps some conversation and refreshment and on we go. Tonight's liturgy goes to the heart of those simple little words at the end of mass – *go in peace to love and serve the Lord*.

Yet we can easily forget the challenge, the risk, the vulnerability, and the intimacy of eating the body and blood of Jesus Christ that has gone before

those words. On Maundy Thursday feet – the means by which we are to go to serve are themselves a central focus. They remind us there is always a risk, vulnerability, and intimacy of eating Christ's body and blood – humility and self giving love are at the heart though the familiar may often soften or disguise the challenge.

Tonight Jesus offers his life in bread, wine, **and** washing. The choice is not just for tonight but every day and every night, not just in the liturgy but in the world.

Deep intimate love both attracts and draws some to this liturgy but also keeps many others away. Some will wash and be washed and many will not. The choice of whether to wash feet is but a choice to love or not love. Jesus chose to love. Not some, but all. That is the choice before us. We cannot choose to love only those whom we like, whom we deem deserving or for whom we have good feelings. If we do not love all, we love none like Christ.

In Jesus' teaching if you have feet you get washed, regardless of where those feet have been or where they are going. That is the example and commandment he sets before his disciples and us this night.

The first difficult person the disciples will have to choose to love or not love is clearly Judas, the one who turns away, the one who walks in the night, the one who betrays. This often mirrors our choices too. We all have at least one Judas in our life and as importantly each of us has been Judas to someone else – sometimes even to ourselves – certainly the person God in Christ wills us to be. And yet he always serves, always loves and always bid us come back to that place of perfect communion.

*The Revd Fr. David Wylie RN  
Maundy Thursday 2023*