

## Holy Thursday

In his book *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, author Alan Paton tells a story set in the apartheid era about the relationship between Reverend Isaiah Buti, the black pastor of the Holy Church of Zion, and Judge Christiaan Olivier, the Afrikaner who was the Acting Chief Justice of South Africa. Buti invites Olivier to come to his church on Holy Thursday night in an effort to promote a positive relationship between black and white to which they were both committed. Buti asks Olivier if he would wash the feet of Martha Fortuin, who was a servant in Olivier's house when his children were young. Olivier agrees readily saying that she had washed the feet of all his children. Why would he not wash her feet?

But, Olivier says he will do it only as a private person. He did not want to parade himself as a Judge. At the service not only did Olivier wash Martha's feet, he took them in his hands and kissed them. Not a dry eye in the house! At the same time a young reporter followed Olivier to church trying to get his "story of the year." The next morning the story broke in the newspaper and Judge Olivier, like Christ himself, faced his passion and wrath of the white supporters of apartheid and the ruin of his legal career.

On this night on the first Holy Thursday Jesus lays aside his own garments. Tomorrow he will lay aside his very life. Tonight he himself lays aside his own garments. Tomorrow his clothing will be ripped off him by others. Tonight he wraps a towel around himself and puts on the visible sign of his love. Tomorrow, naked on the cross he will be wrapped in nothing but his own blood.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet without discrimination. Judas is there and he is not passed by. Jesus' community of disciples was not some elite group or a gathering of the perfect. Peter will protest Jesus washing his feet. Perhaps Peter knows that this is what Jesus will demand of him. Being warned that he will have no part with Jesus unless his feet are washed Peter become wildly enthusiastic about the washing of his hands and head as well. Jesus

patiently explains to him that it is the quality of his relationship with Jesus, not the quantity that makes the true disciple.

Blessed by the loving service of Jesus they are now called to be given, broken, consumed in the service of one another. This is what communion is all about. This is what Eucharist is all about. The only way out of this room will be through Gethsemane and Calvary. This is what will lead to resurrection and new life.