

# Holy Thursday

How many times in the gospels do we hear Jesus say in response to some question, “My hour has not yet come.” He said it to Mary when she asked about more wine for the newlyweds at Cana. He said it to James and John who wanted him to rain down fire and brimstone on an unwelcoming town. But tonight Jesus’ hour *has* come. This is the hour of his radical and privileged decision-making, the beginning of Jesus’ journey from this world through death and resurrection and his return to the Father.

Tonight Jesus celebrates this last meal with his friends and with a friend turned enemy. Tonight Jesus rises and sets aside his garments to perform an act of service. Tomorrow he will set aside his own life. Tonight he clothes himself with a towel. Tomorrow he will be clothed as a fool and then stripped naked.

The hour has come for Jesus when he shows his love for his own to the very end, the hour when the Father gives all things into his hands. John tells us what these things are tonight; a towel, a bowl of water, and the feet of his disciples. These are such ordinary, humble, human realities with which Jesus will show the depths of his love. Tomorrow the salvation of the world will be put into his hands which are nailed to the wood of the cross. John reminds us by the washing of feet, this parable in action if you will, that Jesus is Servant, one who is ready to do the dirty jobs, to be at the bottom of the social heap, to take the last place along with those we shove down: the abused, the marginalized, the refugees, the unemployed, those with physical and psychological disabilities and all the rest.

There is a great movie called “Of Gods and Men.” It is inspiration and it is a continuation of what Jesus did on the first Holy Thursday and Good Friday. It is the story of seven Trappist monks who chose to stay in the town where their monastery is, during the middle of a civil war in Algeria. It happened just a few years ago. As a Christian minority in a largely Muslim country

they are looked upon with suspicion. But the local people who know them well know of their kindness and generosity. In a very poor town where most are illiterate the monks teach the locals how to read and write. In a town where medical services are not available, one of the monks, a physician, gives free service. In the middle of a town where there is a civil war going on, their monastery remains a place of peaceful refuge. When the war begins their Abbot General in Rome tells them to go back to France for their sake of their own safety. The movie shows how they come to their decision to stay. In one of the scenes a monk passes by a picture of the last supper, stops and leans his ear up to the chest of Jesus as though looking for an answer from Jesus as to what to do. He must have got his answer because the seven monks decide to stay. A month later they are all killed, beheaded in their monastery. After their deaths, those who came to retrieve the bodies found a letter from the abbot there offering forgiveness to his killer and asking him to do whatever he could to bring about peace.

This sounds very much like what we're celebrating today and tomorrow as we remember what Jesus did for us.

So this foot washing tonight is not just a nice ceremony. By it we are stating that we are willing to put our feet in the hands of another – to make ourselves vulnerable – to set aside power for service. In the vulnerability of bread eaten and wine drunk, Jesus asks us to follow his example, to get down metaphorically, and serve one another, despite the dust and smell and misunderstandings, to be hospitable when we live in a society that puts such great value on self-reliance and getting ahead. When we do this we too have a share in the hospitality of the kingdom.