

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 2nd 2015

Holy Thursday and its readings seem to me to be all about past and prelude, anticipation and foreshadowing, nourishment for body, for heart, for soul. We see the scene set, the past and future as Passover unfolds in the first reading with the preparations and the meal: A reminder of what Moses and the faithful had endured and how the faithful were saved. The second reading from Corinthians has so much power as we hear the words that are imprinted on our memories and hearts from countless Masses. To imagine those words being spoken for the first time during that Passover meal with the apostles fills me with awe.

The verse before the Gospel struck me as I contemplated Holy Thursday as the bridge between Lent and Easter, the past and the future. “Love one another as I have loved you.” As Holy Thursday foreshadows what is to come, the depth of that commandment is staggering. How can I begin to live that out? In small steps. In recognizing God in everyone I meet. In taking time to figure out how I can live out that new commandment, nourished by communion.

We get a powerful lesson in how to do that in the Gospel. I have always loved this story and its images, but even more so now as I have spent some time in Uganda, where people often walk long distances to get water, to get to town. In the northern part of Uganda, the main roads are paved, but there are dusty shoulders and smaller roads. Every place I stayed had a small basin where you could wash your often dusty feet after a day of walking on the roads. It always made me think of this Gospel and how dusty the apostles’ feet probably were. I’ve always understood the ceremonial aspect, but reality of life on another continent brought home to me the magnitude of that simple act of washing someone else’s feet. There’s a saying about walking a mile in someone’s shoes to help you understand that person’s life. I think the new commandment of “love one another as I have loved you” asks us to do that: To accept others as they are, to find God in them, to understand the paths they have walked.

As Holy Thursday and Easter unfold, I pray that I repeat that commandment and walk for and with others.

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