

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Mar 28th 2024

A vocation to kneel down to serve the despised

Today the Church celebrates the feast of the institution of the Eucharist and therefore, it is also the day to celebrate priesthood. It is the day to celebrate our vocation to go down on our knees to wash the feet of one another. Please remember to pray for your priests as we go through the liturgy today!

Fr. Ron Rolheiser gives us a beautiful reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist and Foot-washing. We should be on our knees washing each others' feet because that is precisely what Jesus did at the first Eucharist, and he did it to teach us that the Eucharist is not a private act of devotion but an invitation to service. The Eucharist is meant to send us out into the world, ready to give expression to the mercy of Christ, humility of Christ, and his self-sacrifice.

Jesus tells this to us when he institutes the Eucharist. The Eucharist invites us to receive nourishment from God, be filled with gratitude, and break open our lives to serve the poor in hospitality, humility, and self-sacrifice. Where the other gospels have Jesus saying, "This is my body; this is my blood; do this in memory of me", John has him wash his disciples' feet. For John, this gesture replaces the words of institution. It specifies what the Eucharist is, in fact, meant to do, namely, to lead us out of the Church into the humble service of others.

To take the Eucharist seriously is to begin to wash the feet of others, especially the feet of the poor. The Eucharist is both an invitation that invites us and a grace that empowers us to service. And what it invites us to do is to replace distrust with hospitality, pride with humility, and self-interest with self-donation so as to reverse the world's order of things – wherein the rich get served by the poor and where the first priority is always to keep one's pride intact and one's self-interest protected. The Eucharist invites us to step down from pride, move away from self-interest and to turn the position of privilege into an opportunity for service.

It is no accident that, for liturgy on Holy Thursday, the feast that marks the institution of the Eucharist, the Church has chosen to use the account of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Indeed, nothing better expresses the meaning of the Eucharist. The Pandemic had deprived us of the reception of the Eucharist... but it has taught us to live in the spirit of the Eucharist – the spirit of washing one another's feet – the spirit of service.