

to keep a job. I see a responsible parent not wanting her child to associate with people living in poverty because her child might be exposed to “those people”.

“ **Even our deepest secrets and unresolved pasts cannot keep us from the tender heart of the merciful Body of Christ.** ”

The long-time parishioner’s opinion is cast aside, the young tattooed youth who meditates daily receives disparaging looks at Eucharist and the pregnant thirteen-year-old absorbs her portion of stares - and more. We easily cast our worries on others and put public blame on the weary and the downtrodden.

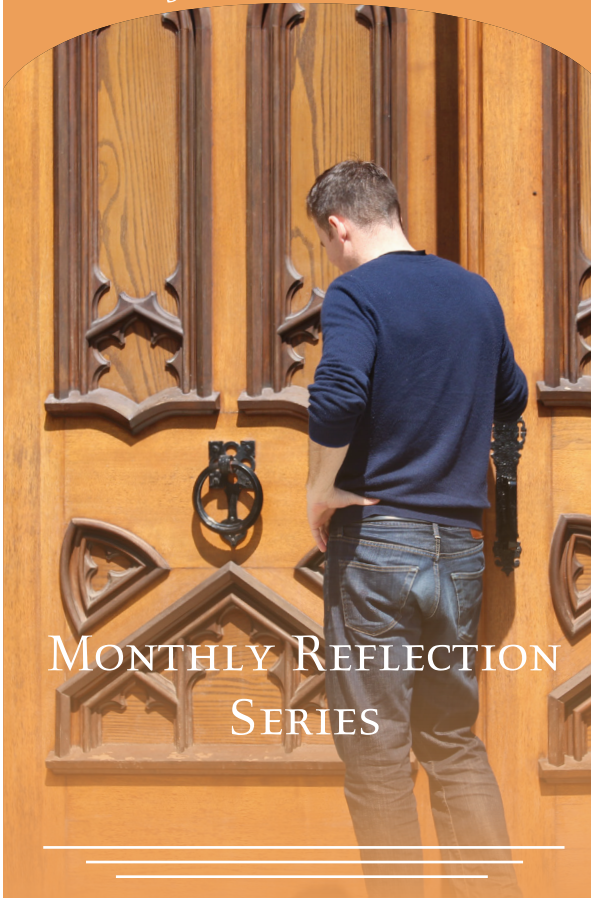
We are all servants of God who asks us to lose our lives to find the joy of life. Even our deepest secrets and unresolved pasts cannot keep us from the tender heart of the merciful Body of Christ. At the foot of the altar we learn to rest our pride, our arrogance, our prejudice and our corruption because of those who teach us that tears and remorse reveal the real presence of Christ Jesus.

Ordained in 1983, Fr. Ron Raab, C.S.C., currently serves as Pastor of the Tri-Community Parish in Colorado Springs, Colorado. For many years, Fr. Ron ministered among the vulnerable and marginalized of society and the Church. From his experiences in living the Gospel among the poor, Fr. Ron speaks about prayer and service and knowing the love of God through our common poverty. Fr. Ron writes for several liturgical magazines.



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## The Deep Print of Secrets

by Rev. Ronald Raab, C.S.C.

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I hold sacred many people's secrets. The elderly mother whispers in my ear after Sunday Mass her dreams for her handicapped son. The eye-shadowed addict stops me on the street and confesses amid the blurring noise of a passing bus the reasons why he does not enter a church building. I hear the hushed voices in our confessional on weekdays admitting with deep wounds their personal grievances of the past. The parish volunteer catches me before the morning opening of our weekday hospitality center to entrust to me the secrets of his weekend.

All these holy encounters teach me to walk the path toward God's healing and mercy. The only path I know to carry these fragile encounters is the path toward the Eucharist. Some days I am weighed down processing to the foot of the altar. There I find the deep prints of the secrets I carry with me. Often I am overwhelmed with love for the people who share their complex lives of suffering with me. I also worry about many people who are asked to carry burdens beyond which their hearts can bear. At the foot of the altar, I leave the dusty prints of my body carrying the grief, hardship and tragedy of so many people.

I carry people's heart disclosures to the Eucharist because the Gospel of Luke teaches me to do so. These stunning passages we proclaim during the Sunday Eucharist in June open up for me the

profound grace hidden in each of the secrets I carry.

A woman from the city comes to the table where Jesus is eating at the home of a Pharisee. She carries an alabaster flask of ointment in her arms and her secrets in her glass heart. Her secrets seem to be known publicly in the village. Word is on the street about her life and how she lives. Nevertheless, she carries with fragile reverence her secrets to the place where Jesus is sharing a meal.



She makes her way to his feet, grasping her flask at her chest to protect what is inside of her. At the sight of Jesus, she breaks through; her secrets spill out along with her bottled-up tears of regret, shame and years of being isolated. The sacred flow of water and secrets intermingle and together cleanse the dusty feet of Jesus. She seems to understand already that her life will be carried by Jesus along with other people's lives to the cross. The path to

the cross will bear the deep prints of sin, known and unknown. She realizes already the depth of forgiveness and mercy that comes from his unflinching presence.

Jesus also reveals love to the Pharisee. Simon believes the woman's identity comes from her sin. Simon sees her only through the label that he and other people have placed on her. Jesus says to Simon that he did not wash his feet or give him a kiss or anoint his head. Jesus reminds him that the woman bathed his feet with tears, kissed them and anointed them. In this encounter, Jesus teaches Simon and everyone at the table, that the woman crying at his feet is worth more than her sin.

This profound story teaches me that Jesus wanted the woman to be restored to real joy. This joy is not a label nor is it fake or flashy. This joy comes from the honest love of God where all of us are more than our sinfulness and more than the everyday mistakes we make in our relationships. This joy is not a label. This joy comes from being at the feet of Christ and knowing and believing in our inherent worth as a child of God.

I know firsthand how our labels keep people separate, at a distance from our sense of belonging. The person with mental illness is easily labeled incapable of understanding life so is not taken seriously by others. I hear a wealthy executive blame a man experiencing homelessness for the man's inability