

Eucharist we celebrate in our day. In washing his disciples' feet and returning to his place at table, Jesus offers us a model for how to use our own authority in loving service of others. "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

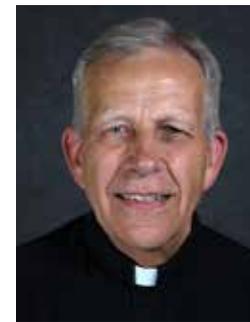
All of the Evangelists say the same thing many times: Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. This is underscored in the other Gospels when the brothers James and John ask the Lord (or their mother asks for them) for a position in the kingdom. Jesus sets them straight. He tells them that is not a matter of position but rather of loving service.

Finally, it's important to realize that in Jesus' time, foot washing was something children did for their parents and disciples for their teachers. So in this profoundly humble gesture, Jesus shows the intimacy and familiarity that existed between him and disciples whom he had called and whom he had come to know so well. He is not just giving some good ritual instruction. He serves his friends and invites them to serve each other in the same way and to carry on that

tradition for generations to come—simply because "he loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end."

So each time we come to Holy Week's Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper and every time the Master gathers us as friends around his table, we are reminded again of his call to serve.

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A publication of the Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of Priests and Brothers
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APRIL 2019

MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

The Master Reminds Us to Serve

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Well along the path of the Church's Season that guides us from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, we come to Holy Thursday; and perhaps, what we remember most about the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper is the Washing of Feet, when once again, the Master reminds us to serve.

Chapter thirteen of John's Gospel is the principal text for that most memorable gesture, and the Scripture is painstaking in detailing that moment which occurs during the Pascal supper the Lord celebrated with his disciples before continuing on to his crucifixion, death and resurrection. We're told that Jesus knew that he had come from God, that he would return to him, and that the Father had given him complete authority. Immediately after that declaration the evangelist walks us step by step and in slow-motion though those details, to help us follow as closely as possible how Jesus chose to use the authority his Father had given him.

We're told that the Lord rose from his place at table, that he removed his outer garments, took a drying towel, tied the towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began washing the feet of each of his disciples and dried them with the towel he had tied around his waist. When he finished washing their feet, he once again put on the outer

garments he had removed earlier and sat down again at his place at table.

Now if we think that what we just heard and imagined in this passage doesn't sound at all like what one to whom God had given complete authority would do, we find ourselves in the company of the apostle Peter who simply refused, at first, to accept even the idea that his Master would wash his feet. Jesus' statement to his nervous disciple might also apply



to us: "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later".

The Lord spoke directly and compassionately to Peter, who Jesus knew was sincerely trying his best to follow Him. At the same time he spoke to the other disciples who were also struggling to learn from the Master. Finally, he speaks with the same compassion to all of us in our own fumbling attempts to learn from him and follow.

Every year we Christians return to this same liturgical moment. We take part in it, and sometimes even take our place among a dozen uncomfortable people who have their feet washed in front of the faithful assembly gathered together in Holy Week prayer. But we don't just re-enact a memorable scene from the Gospels. We immerse ourselves in the scene because we need to recognize that even if we do grow in our understanding of how to be those sincere disciples who follow the lead of the Master, we are often unsure and let fear and weakness take hold. We falter and fail in our attempts to follow him in using well the authority we have been given. So much of the world around us wants to lead us in another direction and tells us that what the Master shows us doesn't make sense. So, even more, we need to watch

and listen once again to the one who humbly served, so that in our Lenten time of soul-searching we can get back on that road of loving service which, as strange as it might make us feel, leads us and others to new life in his resurrection.

“ What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later. ”

Jesus never sets aside or denies his authority, because it was given to him by his loving Father. He begins the Supper scene in his rightful place at table as the authoritative figure in the midst of his disciples. He then takes the role of a servant, dressed as a gentile slave would for serving the table; and afterwards he returns to that same place of authority. He does all of this in the midst of the Supper he so much wanted to share with his disciples and share with us in the