

# LENT 2017

**We wash the feet when**

*..... we bring food to Sunday Mass to be shared with those who have less resources.*

**We wash the feet**

**when....** *we help the new Canadian learn how to speak English and become familiar with the banking system in Canada.*

**We wash the feet**

**when....** *we try to visit our elderly Aunt in the nursing home. All we can do is hold her hand and help her eat her supper.*

**We wash the feet**

**when.....** *we hold in our prayer people who are suffering. We may never visit a refugee camp but we hold these people and their children in our daily prayer.*

## RECLAIM THE WASHING OF FEET

In the Church we share and express the deep meaning of who we are in actions or in symbolic gestures. Human reality is very large. Just trying to express what is happening in words leaves us feeling cheated. When you try to show appreciation to your Grandfather, who always supported each of his thirteen grandchildren, you do not just speak it out. You gather all the family, make a wonderful cake with candles and you sing ‘happy birthday.’

Words alone just do not cut it! You feel good about the cake (food), the decorations (candles) and the song (everyone participates).

In our Church we seek to enter with depth into the life and service of Jesus. This is why we will wash each others’ feet on Holy Thursday. This is not a ritual that we go through because Jesus did it with his disciples. Rather, we are all entering into the heart, feelings and the intention of Jesus.

Always consider the gestures within the life of the Church like the gate into your Grandmother’s garden. As a child you always remember how big her garden was and remember grabbing peas off the vine and eating them right out in the garden. Fresh peas tasted so good. Look back at that gate. When you opened it, there was so much to explore (and very little was ever in words).

The action of washing the feet of one another is like opening the gate to your grandmother’s garden. There is so much to explore here. Now, open the gate and explore!

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*Today, try to get in touch when someone helped your family. Maybe it was the time your kid brother was hit by a vehicle. Your parents rushed off to the hospital and were there all night. The older neighbors whose kids had grown up just moved in and looked after the three children. They gladly helped out. What does that memory mean to you today?*

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*Make the connection .....*

*Washing the feet is not a polite gesture we do in church but rather a sharing in the very life, work and heart of Jesus. This has all to do with our daily lives.*

*As you wash the feet (or hands) of a sister or brother, think of the times you tried to understand and listen to your twenty-nine year old nephew who has suffered brain damage from a motor cycle accident. While you are seeking to be present to this younger adult, you are also being present to Jesus himself. Your action of caring, listening is a lived expression of the washing of the feet.*

*In your prayer today, consider where else you have served Jesus? where else have you made real the spirit of service and the sharing of your life?*

## WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH 2017?

Jesus lived in a hot, dry climate. There was dust everywhere! As part of hospitality the master of the house would provide a servant to wash the feet of the guests. They wore only sandals. Their feet would have been very dirty.

This was a sign of hospitality and a gracious welcome to the guests. But it was also clothed in a class consciousness. The master did not wash the feet of the guests. This was work that only the servants did. It would have been below the dignity of the master of the house to ever wash the feet of his guests.

At the beginning of the Last Supper (Jn. 13, 1-11) Jesus gets up, wraps a towel around his waist and begins to wash the feet of his disciples. He is breaking the social boundaries.

The disciples protest. They are doing what is socially correct.

This is where Jesus uses his actions to teach one of the most powerful lessons about following God. "If you do not do likewise, you can have no part with me."

This is not a point that we could negotiate. This is a black and white issue. You are in, or you are out!

The washing of the feet spells out that Jesus is a God who is the servant. He does not seek glory and power but rather he pours out his life and love in service.

To help us understand the meaning of this action think of all the things that our society considers important. We are blasted in thousands of ads to buy new electronic equipment, a bigger house, the deluxe coffee maker and a new vehicle. We glory in power and fame. Look who gets air time?

Jesus does exactly the opposite. He was not a person who sought after fame and power. He did not seek to be rich. He never boasts of his knowledge and his skills.

You need to hold in one hand what Canadians consider to be worthwhile and in the other what Jesus actually does that is worthwhile.

This attitude of servanthood is necessary requisite to belong to Jesus. It will be the people who take their lives and share their lives in compassion that will count at the bottom line. The truth will be told through our dirty hands that helped other grow food in their garden, hands that lifted up the sick and the infirm and hands that encouraged the discouraged and the brokenhearted.

The action of washing the feet on Holy Thursday is to root the people of the Church in a life of service and compassion.



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### Prayer always leads to our feet

In our spiritual life we pray to enter into the very heart and mind of Jesus. Prayer is not talking to Jesus about all our troubles but rather walking into the very concerns and values of Jesus. Prayer is always a forward movement into the heart of Jesus.

This is where the washing of the feet is such a corrective.

We pray so that our feet get moving. Prayer is not about using our hands to collect wealth and accumulate more stuff. It is all about being moved by the spirit of Jesus to get our feet moving in the direction of service.

We pray to enter into the great love that God has for all human beings. There is no distinction made between those who are rich, skillful and economically stable from those who

live 'hand to mouth' poverty. The skin, gender and employment record of a human being does not register with God. As we clearly teach, prayer is about entering to the divine heart that topples all the distinctions that we human beings make. Prayer is upsetting!

Prayer certainly does not try to make us comfortable and allow us to only talk with our own kind. Prayer will always stretch us.

When we pray it moves our feet. The washing of the feet highlights what needs to happen within our lives.

Try to imagine what could happen if everyone who joined you at the Sunday Eucharist this Sunday would walk out of this church building and go to spend some time with a friend or colleague who is being cared for in a nursing home, or is at home with their caregiver spouse? What kind of goodness would flow from this Sunday?

Or it may mean that we pay a little more attention to the new Canadians at work. It means making sure that they understand the tasks they have been assigned or responding with understanding to the people they are meant to serve. This means serving on our feet.

Can you see the connection between our prayer and our feet?

This year, when you wash feet (or hands) in your parish, think what Jesus is asking you to do?

The gesture of kindness may be very small by human standards, but it is directly connected with Jesus. Your thoughtfulness toward the forgotten ones is always a kindness to Jesus himself.

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening ...** *may I wash the feet of the members of my own family, in all their needs and difficulties.*

**Speak, Lord, your servant is listening ...** *that my action of washing the feet / hands is matched by my service to the poor of this world.*

#### You are only praying if .....

- you search for the very heart of Jesus.
- you want to love your fellow human being as Jesus truly loves them.
- you want to bring respect to everyone just as Jesus brought respect to the poor and the forgotten.

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**Have your own feet washed... there are many times when you can not do it alone. You want to walk together in solidarity when your sister cares for you through a bad bout of pneumonia, the discouragement of being downsized from the oil patch and the pain of losing your very best friend.**

### **Lent turns us toward the washing of each other's feet.**

We had a young adult, mid twenties, in the other day. He shared that he was a very spiritual person. Then he described his spirituality: "It is God and me." His face exhibited sincere satisfaction.

But this is so much off the mark! This is what prayer must never be!

Lent is a time to turn towards prayer. We lead very busy lives and find so little time to be with the Lord. Use this time wisely. Find a few moments each day to focus on the needs and concerns of Jesus.

Prayer was never meant to be an activity that just focused on our own needs. We are meant to be embraced by the resurrected Jesus who urges us to move out of

ourselves in service and love for the poor of this world.

Prayer means that we are grasped by the power of Jesus' love. It means to hear the tears he cries for the suffering and the exploited of the world. Prayer is not some feel-good exercise but rather it is getting dressed up to get onto the playing field. In other words, we get involved with the way that Jesus cares and loves the world.

When we reflect on the ritual of washing the feet we are centered in on the truth of all prayer. It leads us to serve and give of ourselves as Jesus gives of himself to us. It leads us to a life of washing the feet of others each day of our life.

**I have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.**

**He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end**

**Jesus rose from the table, removed his outer garments,**

**took a towel, tied it around his waist,**

**poured water into the basin,**

**and began to wash his disciples' feet.**

**Teacher, help us learn this one**

**last lesson: You serve.**

**Infinite, all-powerful God, inexhaustible love serves.**

**Let us not ignore or merely tolerate our neighbors.**

**Let us wash, like you, their feet**

**and become for them their food and drink.**