

Holy Thursday
April 8, 2004 – Cathedral of St. Mary
Bishop Samuel J. Aquila

This evening I would like to reflect with you upon the humility of our God, of Jesus Christ, and to reflect upon that at two levels. The first is within the washing of the feet. The other is His humility within the Eucharist.

In the washing of the feet, we see Jesus doing the work of a servant. He does the work of the least of the servants. The washing of the feet for the Jewish people and for the people in the times in which He lived was always reserved for the least. He reminds His disciples that He is the one who must wash them. “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with Me.” Jesus washes the feet of the twelve.

Last night as I was reflecting upon this reading, it struck me for the first time that Judas was one of those twelve. In all of the years that I have read this passage, it never struck me that Judas had his feet washed by Jesus. I wonder what went on in the hearts and minds of Judas and Jesus at that moment. It required utter and total humility for Jesus to wash the feet of the one He knew was to betray Him. What kinds of things ran through Jesus’ mind? Perhaps the Sermon on the Mount where He uttered the words, “Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.” Imagine Jesus’ tremendous act of humility, washing the feet of the other twelve -- some whom would run off, Peter who would betray Him, John who would stand at the foot of the cross, and Judas, His betrayer. Jesus

reminds His disciples and reminds all of us that He has set an example, “I have given you a model to follow so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

My sisters and brothers, how many of us would wash the feet of the person who we may find most difficult in life? Of a person who we might totally dislike? Of a person who has harmed us, hurt us, wounded us? Yet Jesus, in His radical humility, reminds us that we are to do the same, that we are to imitate Him. He sets that example of humility for all of us to be people who are rooted in the love that He is rooted in, in the love of the Father.

We hear the words of John as he is writing this passage, “He loved his own in the world and He loved them to the end,” and that, too, included Judas. He loved him to the end. Where Peter was able to respond to that love and seek His forgiveness, Judas was not. Do we see that humility? Do we even attempt to understand that type of humility that the second person of the Trinity, a divine person, God Himself, washes the feet of the one who would betray Him, the one who would deny Him, the ones who would run off, and the one who would stand at the foot of the cross? It serves as an excellent meditation for all of us of what we are called to do and how we are called to serve.

Second is the humility of Jesus, as we see it within the Eucharist. Jesus leaves for our nourishment the gift of His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. In a very real way, every time the Eucharist is celebrated it is an act of the Incarnation. It is an act of the Word made flesh. It is an act of making present His one sacrifice. Our God is so humble that

He makes Himself present in the simple gifts of bread and wine that are transformed substantially and totally into His Body and Blood. He puts Himself at service to each one of us present here, to everyone who partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ. That love is tremendous. It is revealed in every Eucharist.

In the opening prayer, we pray that we might become more aware of the love and life that we receive. In the first reading from the book of Exodus, we see the prefigurement of the Eucharist that takes place. That prefigurement is the blood of a lamb over a doorpost that saves the people from death, that saves the people of Israel.

The Blood that you and I share, the Communion that you and I have with the Blood of Christ, is far greater. It is not the blood of a lamb. It is the Blood of God. It is not blood that is placed on a doorpost, but it is Blood that you and I consume, in the midst of our weakness, in the midst of our sinfulness, in the midst of our brokenness. It is the humble desire of Jesus to enter our lives. That is the love that you and I receive, the communion to which we are called each and every time we receive the Eucharist.

My sisters and brothers, as we reflect upon this night of Holy Thursday, let us remember the words of St. John, "He loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end." Our God in His humility gives to us an example in the washing of the feet of what it means to be a servant, what it means to love, what it means to be humble. In the Eucharist He gives us an even deeper insight and understanding of that humility and He continues to love each one of us to the end.

Let us allow Jesus, through this Eucharist, to wash our feet, and as we enter into communion with His Blood, let us pray that we may receive that love and live it out each day until that day when we enter into the fullness of love itself.