

Thursday in Holy Week. Today we return to John's gospel. John gives a very different account of the last meal that Jesus had with the disciples. And he introduces us to what should be another sacrament, like sharing bread and wine and baptism, but isn't. Some call it the yucky sacrament and it is foot washing. Some church still do it this day but I suspect it is fewer and fewer.

Before we turn to the reading let us turn to God in prayer.

God of grace and God of mercy,

We come this evening with a mixture of emotions. We come hurting and grieving, we come tired and helpless. We come with expectations of sharing, we come hoping to encounter you. Help us to be open to your presence, in your word, in bread and wine, in our hearts.

Speak to us this evening that we might hear your words of forgiveness and love, that we

may eat on the bread of life and drink in the new salvation.

For those who hurt wash your healing over them.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

John 13 Common English Bible (CEB)

Foot washing

13 Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

2 Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. 6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

8 "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me."

9 Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

10 Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you."

He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean."

12 After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. 14 If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do."

Foot-washing has taken on more symbolic relevance recently. The Pope does it or the minister will do it for a few volunteers. We, Like Peter, do not readily come forward to have our feet washed, but would be happy to watch. Feet are strange. Cleaning feet can be deeply moving. It is not something to be done in a hurry. It takes time to clean and dry feet properly, but feet can tell us a lot about the rest of our health.

And when you have a problem with feet you quickly know how much we take them for granted.

In the hot and dust time of Jesus when sandals were the only form of footwear, slaves would wash a guests feet before they came into the house. Jesus' actions says that he will take on the role of a slave, the lowest in the household. Peter wasn't just squeamish about Jesus washing his feet, he thought that it was wrong, he should be washing Jesus' feet. Jesus threatens the relationship with Peter, unless you wash you won't have a pace with me. That is pretty extreme.

Peter had to learn to receive before he could give. He had to know that this demanded his full participation. It wasn't something that he could watch from the sidelines. Holy Week can feel really intense because we have to receive and we have to participate. It draws

us into the story and exposes some of our hidden emotions.

And communion is something that draws us in and burrows down into us. We have to participate in that too, we have to eat and drink. We open ourselves up to the unexpected, and to the Holy. We take it in, in a literal and spiritual way. God resides in us. The mystic Meister Eckhart said that God is a thousand times more ready to give than we are to receive. Peter had to learn that.