

He Loved Them to the End

John 13

What We Found

Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. Then the theology of the towel, written in the syntax itself: knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God and was going to God, he rose, laid aside his garments, and washed feet. Not humility despite the majesty, but majesty's own self-expression, and the very verbs of laying aside and taking again are the verbs of the Good Shepherd laying down his life to take it again. The foot washing is the cross in miniature, with a towel.

Peter refused to be served, which is pride in humility's coat, and heard the non-negotiable: if I do not wash you, you have no part in me. Grace is received before it is imitated. The bath, once for all, is Baptism; the feet gather the road's daily dust, washed continually in forgiveness and, in the Church's practice, in Confession. We weighed honestly whether the towel abolishes hierarchy and found the opposite: you call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am; the rank is affirmed and then redefined by the basin it carries, and in the same breath he affirmed the weight of sending itself: he who receives any one whom I send receives me. Then Psalm 41 at the table, the friend who ate my bread; the morsel offered to Judas, heard by many as love's last appeal, and refused; and the two most devastating words of our longest thread: he immediately went out, and it was night. With the betrayer gone, Jesus said now is the Son of Man glorified, and gave the commandment his beloved disciple would repeat into extreme old age: love one another, as I have loved you, the new measure, by which all men will know. And Peter boasted in the Shepherd's own borrowed words, and was given a schedule instead of a doubt: before the cock crows, three denials.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractates 56-57

The man who has bathed is clean all over, the once-for-all bath of Baptism; yet so long as he walks this earth his feet gather the dust of the road. So the Lord who bathed us once stoops daily to wash our feet, in the forgiveness we beg in the Our Father and receive in the Church. The bath is not repeated; the footwashing never stops.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Benedict of Nursia, The Rule of St. Benedict, chapters 35 and 53

Benedict did not admire the towel; he legislated it. The brothers finishing their kitchen week wash the feet of the whole community, and when guests arrive, the abbot himself washes their feet, for all guests are received as Christ. Fifteen centuries of monks have knelt on schedule: love with a rota, humility with assigned shifts.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Jerome, recounting the aged Apostle John, Commentary on

Galatians

The Apostle John, extremely old in Ephesus and carried to the assembly in his disciples' arms, would say only: little children, love one another. Asked why he always repeated it, he answered: because it is the Lord's commandment, and if it alone is kept, it is enough. The apostle remembered as the one who leaned on Jesus' breast spent his last strength on this chapter's one commandment.

Live It This Week

- **Wash one set of feet.** Choose one concrete act of service this week that is genuinely beneath you, unglamorous, unthanked, for one specific person, and do it quietly. Not service in general: one basin, one pair of feet, this week.
- **Let him wash you.** The bathed still need their feet washed. Get to Confession this week if it has been a while: kneel as a receiver, which Peter found harder than dying, and let the Lord do the part you cannot.
- **The old apostle's examen.** Each night this week, end the day with the aged John's one question: did I love them today, as he has loved me? One question, honestly answered, is a complete examen.

Memory Verse

John 13:34 (RSV2CE)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Before Next Session

Read John 14, 15, and 16, the farewell discourse, in one sitting if you can; it is one conversation on one night. Session 12: The Paraclete and the Vine. Bring your sealed guess. Its Passover has arrived.

Catechism References

CCC 520, 616, 1337, 1823.