

HOLY THURSDAY

Fr Callistus Khathali - HOMILY : HOLY (MAUNDY) THURSDAY

John 13:13-15

You call me Lord and Master, and rightly so, I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.

My reflection is on three important points that come from the gospel passage (John 13:1-15) of the mass of the Lord's Supper which marks the beginning of the three days (Easter or Paschal Triduum) of the Paschal Mystery:

Jesus' enduring love

Jesus' total oblation

Peter's refusal to the "washing of feet"

The last words of the opening verse of this chapter are ***"having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end."*** In the heart of the mysteries that we are beginning to celebrate is the greatest love that Jesus has for the entire human race. This was made manifest at the last supper, and reached its summit when he died on the cross. Such love cannot be reduced to Jesus feeling sorry for the sinful human race! It is actually his response to the sinful human race, He loved them till the end during his time here on earth, and he continues to love us unconditionally irrespective of where we find ourselves regarding our sinful reality.

In the middle of verse four we read, "removed his outer garments." Basically he took off his clothes. On the fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday) we had the gospel of the prodigal son (Luke 15:1-3,11-32). In verse 22 as the prodigal son returned, his father ordered that he be clothed with the best robe. Jesus as the Lord and Master was surely wearing the best royal robe since he was also a king. As the son of God he surely wore a divine robe as well. This is what he took off! It is important to note that this was a personal choice. The stripping that happened when he was about to be crucified is better understood by this choice he had already made at the last supper. John does not give an account of Jesus taking up bread and wine at the last supper as his body and blood offered for the entire human family. This is indeed part and parcel of his self-emptying, total giving of himself (oblation) for our salvation.

Finally we have Peter refusing to have his feet washed. He simply could not allow his Lord and Master to make himself his servant, or most importantly his slave who did not have freedom. Peter's reasoning was correct taken from the human understanding of this gesture. Jesus did not take what Peter said. Peter was actually wrong even to the point of running the risk of forfeiting his share in the kingdom. Peter was wrong because he applied human reasoning and logic to what was the divine act of self-giving and absolute love. Peter reminds us of how we can totally lose what the Lord reveals to us if we ONLY base ourselves on human reasoning. Our invitation therefore is to fully enter into these Paschal Mysteries in the way that the Lord wants us to, and not our human thinking or reasoning.

May you have a wonderful Holy Thursday, I will be united with you in prayer as I thank God for choosing me, and other fellow priests to be the continuous and constant presence of Jesus' priesthood characterized by his immense love for our human family, his total giving of himself for our salvation even by taking form of a slave so as to make us free.

Fr Callistus Khathali