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Holy Thursday Reflection, 2019

Not long ago, I received a publication suggesting that readers choose a word as a guide for their day. This was to be a real effort to ponder the word, to put it into practice, to see what unanticipated pull it may have on the ordering of our lives. A chosen word could help us during Lent and Holy Week to extend our reflections. Sort of an all day centering prayer.

*But what my* recent reflections on the Last Supper and Jesus' last hours led to was an enthralling dream - I invited Jesus and his apostles to our house for dinner. (My husband would be saying "Any excuse for a party!") And they accepted – and so they needed to walk down our street in their long robes and sandals, laughing and talking. Then, unfortunately, I woke up – but thought: Jesus really wants to be with us. In the Last Supper He gifts us with a great model and invites us to share in a great mystery.

In today's gospel Jesus says very directly "I have given you a Model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Jesus modelled many things, but two perhaps stand out: humbly serving others and persevering to the very end.

To get across his message of humble service, Jesus chose something very physical: he washed the feet of his apostles. And he told us: "If I have washed your feet...you ought to wash one another's feet."

So tonight we'll imitate Jesus and wash each others hands or feet. We discussed the logistics for these at the Worship core

team, and that night I dreamt that we also offered a station for the washing of hair. Perhaps thinking of Peter who wanted his head washed as well. But we'll stay with washing hands and feet as a symbol that we are not too proud to serve others nor too proud to be served.

A nurse friend of ours volunteered at a shelter, caring for the feet of the homeless, trimming corns and callouses, cutting toenails – all sorts of glamorous services. She understood the example of Christ. As family, as friends, and perhaps also professionally, we help care for the bodies of others, a demanding and truly sacred trust. I felt privileged to care for my husband in his lengthy final illness. I didn't feel so privileged a year later when I needed care after surgery. But humbly offering care to others and humbly accepting the need to be cared for (even if, like Peter, we protest a bit) are both modelled by Jesus.

In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians we heard the words of Jesus that we now hear at each Mass: "Do this in remembrance of me." He couldn't have been worried about being forgotten – but he knew his apostles would feel lost without Him and wonder what to do. When we lose someone we love we try to find ways to remember them; we pray for them and to them, we find comfort in being with others who knew and loved them; we retain little routines we had shared with them.

The apostles could do all these things, but Jesus "who loved His own in the world and loved them to the end" tells them exactly how to honor and remember Him. Remember me in the breaking of the bread. "This is my body...this is my blood." He will still be with his apostles and with us. We participate in an

awesome mystery of a God who holds us in existence and nourishes us along the way.

At the same meal, Jesus gave the commandment: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Remember me by living as I lived. During Lent Bellarmine reflected on ways to do this: by visiting those in prison, by celebrating abilities of all people, by honoring the Jewish ritual of Seder. In a Spirituality of Aging group, we learned of a Buddhist practice of loving-kindness, a love that is universal and non-judgmental; that includes compassion, understanding, and forgiveness, a love that in its very name is linked with kindness. It sounds like the love modeled by Jesus, a love that he persevered in to the very end, despite the machinations of others.

For John tells us that Jesus “knew that his hour had come.” He was well aware that he had aggravated both civic and religious leaders. And finally his teachings cost him his life.

So what about us? We don’t know the extent of the challenges we may face. We do know we live in a time when the dignity of many is being threatened. Our challenge is how to respond – and we know our failings often come from what we don’t do. Jeanne Hunt in a recent article speaks of her sin of omission when she did not stand up for someone being belittled by a group of her friends. No matter the challenge, Jesus encourages us to be our better selves.

Pondering the events of Holy Week easily leads to pondering our own deaths. I’ve been working on the playlist of music I want available if I have a lingering period before I die. My list

includes Oh Holy Night, Beethoven's Ode to Joy, "May the Morning Star" from the Exultet on Holy Saturday and "Now we Remain". Some of the verses may be problematic - but it reminds us that we hold the death of Jesus deep in our hearts. And Jesus' message of Holy Thursday seems to be "Yes, hold my death deep in your heart, but hold my life deep in your heart also –because I lived it for love of you."