

## **“Service and the Mass” - Maundy Thursday**

It has come to my attention that some who were asked to have their feet washed declined because they felt that their feet were not in the state they would wish them to be for public exposure. Now that is perfectly understandable and, of course, acceptable. Though I have been denied a chance, therefore, to grow in holiness! For one of the key conversion moments of St Francis of Assisi's youth was his kissing, despite his revulsion, of a man with leprosy. By doing the loving thing, he became more loving. However, when I wash and kiss twelve feet tonight I know that I shall be spared anything too hideous. It would probably do me some good not to have been spared.

What makes serving others so beautiful and holy is that it involves making sacrifices and giving yourself to another. That is why Jesus is so firm with Peter when Peter at first refuses to have his feet washed: 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.' Peter didn't realise but he was stopping Jesus sacrificing Himself and giving Himself to him but without Jesus there is no truth, no light, no forgiveness, no eternal life.

We first receive Jesus in the waters of baptism - the feet washing is a foreshadowing - but we continue to regularly receive him in Holy Communion. And this we also celebrate tonight: the first Mass. What you and I queue for at every Mass is nothing we have earned or deserved. Christ freely sacrificed Himself on the cross and gives Himself to us that we may be ever in communion with him. As He said early in his ministry: 'If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will not have life in you.'

Serving others and the Mass are intimately linked. Last night, at the Chrism Mass in the Cathedral, the priests of the diocese renewed their priestly commitment with, I have to say, great hesitation. Bishop Thomas asked us two questions and you could have sung a verse of *I'm forever blowing bubbles* between the question and our eventual response. And, quite frankly, the pause was understandable. For example, the last part of the first question was this:

'Are you resolved to unite yourselves more closely to Christ and try to become more like him by joyfully sacrificing your own pleasure and ambition to bring his peace and love to your brothers and sisters?'

I should say, with joy, 'I am' to that question but also with a little bit of fear and a huge dollop of humility. Please pray for me that I may live that 'I am.' The question reminds me that though the principal reason for priests is to celebrate Mass, the celebration of Mass should impel priests to serve others. And so it is also true that we who have the privilege of receiving Jesus in Holy Communion also have the privilege of Christ's example that we must serve others. If I receive Holy Communion but do not help my brother in need, then I have lost the plot. Equally, if I am constantly serving my sister and do not see the need for a relationship with Jesus, then I shall remain cut off from the knowledge of God's love and my need for Him.

It is wonderful to be together tonight. May we serve each other and love and adore Jesus' great gift to us: Himself.