

CHARITY IN ACTION

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

With your help, Jesus, we want to continue to reflect on what St. Paul says is the most excellent of gifts. If we have Olympic talent to compete in a certain sport, that talent in the eyes of God is negligible in comparison to that talent we baptized Christians have, and that is to live charity and on our supernatural genetic code we have the capacity to approach the new commandment which is to love as Jesus loved. We need to work at it, primarily the grace of God, with our correspondence, but it's the greatest of all gifts we have. So, we are disallowed from having a low self-esteem because most of us are not at an Olympic level of athleticism or ready to will- win a Nobel Prize in some area of science or literature, but all of us have the potential to become saints and reflect that life of Christ, most excellent of virtues. But we see in the teachings of Jesus and the actions of Jesus that charity needs to be concretize more than to be talked about.

In *The Way*, the Holy Spirit gave St. Josemaria a gentle reproach in his enthusiasm for Our Lord as he was giving communion to these Discalced nuns. He would tell the Lord in the intimacy of his heart, I love you more than this one. I love you more than this, this other one; or, I love you more than these. And he was gently reproached and he said, "Love is deeds, not sweet words." And the most important evening Jesus would spend in his public life— I don't know how much time he spent in his resurrected life, but in his public life 25% of the Gospel of St. John is devoted to that last evening. Within that evening, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he had his Last Supper with those apostles. And it's self-evident that before they sat down to eat or reclined to eat, however they- whatever the custom was then, they reclined probably on rugs and pillows. Before that, Jesus did something impractical- put his apostles very much on edge, perhaps some thought he was even losing his mind. He was called Rabbi, he was called Master. He would address throngs of people. He had to slip away privately to avoid the crush of the crowd.

And this is his last evening, and just judging by the contents of the chapters that comprise the Last Supper in St. John, the apostles were on to his imminent demise. I don't know if they realized it was going to be the next day, but they knew that the word sorrow keeps coming up. Jesus alludes to their sorrow because this is the Lord's last farewell. And if he were practicing, at least on a natural level,

good time management, he would spend as much time as possible sharing his profound wisdom for the last time. He had to ordain them priests, he Instituted the Eucharist, he was instructing them on the necessary conditions to bear fruit, to embark upon the New Evangelization, which is the first evangelization. He doesn't- he could have talked about the need to learn other languages, to stay healthy, to be in shape. You- public transportation, for the most part, consisted in walking or taking a boat ride to certain destinations that would take months and decent chances that you would be a victim of a shipwreck or marauders or bandits. He doesn't warn them that their diets will change as they enter into different territories and engage in different cultures.

What is Act One? What is his opening salvo? His opening salvo is that foot washing event. Of all the things he could have done or have said, he does something that only a slave would be expected to do. We include washing the feet in the Holy Thursday liturgy, but literally and figuratively, it's a very sanitized ceremony. The feet are washed, people are well-dressed, and it's limited to 6, 10, 12- whatever it may be. And it has beautiful symbolic value but certainly is not performing a necessary service- that's what you have showers for and soap. And hygiene wasn't even close to what it is now, and sanitation of alleyways and roadways hardly existed. People walked barefoot... no need to elaborate further. Modes of transportation were camels and donkeys. A lot of livestock would be walking through these alleyways, etc. So, it was a service that was needed, especially if you were going to sit down to have supper and you wouldn't be using chairs, you would be reclining on the floor which means somebody else's pair of feet would be near your olfactory senses, meaning the nose.

And what does Jesus do? But let me just read this. John will never forget this, and he gives a bit of an overture of the Last Supper: "Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during the supper when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot Simon son to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments and girded himself with a towel." So, two of those feet belonged to his betrayer and obviously, Jesus, was trying to win him over, win him back. Scripture writers indicate that those garments he was wearing symbolize his divinity, his divine dignity. And he leaves aside his garments and girds himself with a towel- that's the vestiture of a slave in those ancient times. You could see images of those people seeming to be girded with cloth in the Oriental Institute in Chicago, frescoes of ancient Egyptian art, slaves building the pill- pyramids.

"Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded." I would speculate, given that this was a real service and he was efficiently and effectively cleaning their feet and drying them- twenty-four feet, a lot of feet, it took

awhile, perhaps it took an hour and a half- no idea. He didn't have the soap. He had to change the water, it was a bit of a disgusting task, but service nevertheless. And the apostles are shocked.

Peter, the impulsive one and also the future leader, squawks and gives Jesus pushback and gets into a spat with Christ. "He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing, you do not know now, but afterward, you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.'" So, I'm sure that this was a prolonged argument and, did Jesus mean what he said? Yes, because if he is going to lead this new evangelization, this first evangelization, if he's going to lead this newly formed Kingdom, he's got to get this right. There's no amount of self-giving that is excessive. There's no service that is beneath a follower of Christ. In fact, our finest hour is to serve the needs of others, and this is what has convincing power, that we imitate Jesus' spirit of service, his self-giving. It's also an immediate preparation for that ultimate revelation of love when he hung on the Cross for every single individual.

And Peter needs to get this, Peter needs to understand this, because it's- it's love that builds up the Church, the nation Church. It's love that will attract not everybody, but if anybody's gonna come to Christ, it has to be through the magnetic power of a disciple's charity that- whose love knows no boundaries, whose love is excessive. To quote Mother Teresa, that "we are called by Jesus to love until it's hurt- until it hurts." And St. John Paul said that, at times, we have to do too much. And these times call for a translation of this event. And let's see how we do it, let's read on.

Well, Jesus makes sure that the disciples know that he had not lost his mind. I'm sure there was a very awkward and uncomfortable silence. I'm sure they all collectively had the jitters, you know, why is he doing this? And he did it very well. "When he had washed their feet and taken his garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right for so I am.'" And so, Jesus- I'm aware that I'm divine. I'm aware that I'm a rabbi, that I'm a teacher. I'm aware of that. I have not lost my mind, I know what I'm doing. And here's the clincher. "If I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do, as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who was sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Lord, okay, obviously you're not being literal about this except in a Holy Thursday ceremony, and that just applies to the main celebrant. But Jesus says, we have to wash one another's feet. We have to do what he did. And, what does that mean, that we have to translate this. It's an allegory. It's a real event, but we need to foot wash in spirit. And maybe step number one is, through our prayer,

through our life of piety, through our Eucharistic piety, Lord, my passion, as they say today, is to wash feet- whether as a painter, an auto-mechanic, lawyer, teacher, homemaker, I want to have that attitude of washing feet. Alright.

Well, let's look at- as usual, Jesus, let's look at the Holy Family for a few moments. We know very little about his hidden life as it were, but we know more than we realize. Everything cited in the gospel, everything he said in the gospel he did via the ordinary. He foot washed, translating that into ordinary deeds of love, ordinary charity. It's not a lesser charity, it's just packaged in ordinariness. I would say, at the Last Supper, actually washing feet, given the culture of the time and the lack of sanitary conditions, that was quite extraordinary. But he wants us to be a good foot-washer. And he had that attitude in his home life. And more than, okay, we'll make sure you pass the potatoes, be more alert, that people need to be served the potatoes if you have a plate of potatoes and you're eating with your family. Of course, that's an act of service, a Christian act of service. But before we get into detail, we want to have that attitude of service, that I want to believe that that's my finest hour. The more I could serve willingly, the better. The more I connect with Christ, the more I reveal Christ. I'm giving a meditation, but I'm not that naive to think that simply preaching is going to move the heart as much as walking the walk, a witness of kindness, a witness of love, a witness of charity speaks maybe ten meditations to make a point.

Where did he foot wash in his hidden life as a carpenter? That was a service, making people's lives more comfortable, repairing their homes, repairing their furniture if they had any such a thing, their farm instruments. He seemed to have hung around with a lot of sick people in his public life. He was always with sick people, curing sick people, visiting sick people. That probably stayed the same. In those days modern medicine or medicine was for the most part, quackery. All you needed was strep throat and most likely you died because no antibiotics- constant mortality rate was very high. So, we could- we could imagine him with sick people, sick people who were his clients, sick people who were his relatives, people- sick people in the neighborhood.

So, how do I foot wash in the 21st century? The gospel is eternal- it applies to me. And, as we realize more than okay, you need to do one, two and three... charity is fluid. Yeah, we- it's in a certain sense is a little bit reactive. What are the needs of the circumstances? What are the needs of the people around me? But I think a standard way of foot-washing is to struggle to be totally engaged with the people around us. First, those who are married, their spouse, totally engaged, totally interested, showing it. It's easy to say, well, I love my spouse, why do I have to keep reiterating that love, whether it's through words or deeds? It's there. That's falling into American pragmatism. The new commandment is called *new* for a reason. It has to be renewed. That we, without being contrived or artificial, to be at least mildly excited in greeting a family member, a friend, a colleague- that's part of that foot washing. We don't want to be governed by people's defects or qualities. What do I mean

by that? Well, that person has a number of defects that may irritate me or have qualities that attract me.

We want, with the grace of God, to love those around us, everybody, you know, those are the people we are in touch with, unconditionally. No, you don't have to prove yourself to win over my love. You don't need certain gifts or qualities to earn my love. Your defects are not an obstacle for me to love you. Just like we've see in that foot-washing two of those feet were Judas' feet, two of the feet were Peter's feet, who would deny him. So, we want to love others unconditionally, that's what foot-washing is about, especially the Cross.

Maybe I could share an anecdote, a few anecdotes. I never had the sacred privilege of knowing St. Josemaria, but I can't complain. I actually exchanged words with a saint- someone who is now a saint... two people who are saints, and one blessed. So, I can't complain. But I would hear- I saw with my own eyes. I knew Bl. Alvaro, and he was busy and I didn't live in the same residence, but he was in charge of Opus Dei when I was preparing for the priesthood in Rome, so I was able to interact with him somewhat. And, what I could say is, once I was in front of him, and you know, he had lots of things on his mind, he was, I mean, he would- before John Paul went to Mexico he was meeting with him every day, preparing, helping the Holy Father prepare for that trip, probably helping with the consecration to Our Lady of Guadalupe. But my point is that he would be totally engaged and very interested. I don't know- he was interested in if I was eating well. He was on record. He was one of the few people there who liked my dresswear. I was a loud dresser, perhaps that's why I was called to the priesthood- that's not a problem now. He was interested in my family. He was- and didn't even bring up what he was doing, which was objectively incomparably more interesting than what I was up to. And that was habitual- always interested, always engaged.

His successor, who now we call Bishop Echevarria, same thing- he would draw you out and- and everyone would feel so comfortable in opening up their heart because he was really in- he was really attentive. And they say the same thing about St. John Paul. Again, he would give you the attitude of availability, I'm here for you. And in our intense, overly programmed culture where we're so sensitive about time, we may neglect the foot-washing of availability. I'm not saying that we waste time and that we're imprudent. I mean, if we have a meeting or if we have deadlines, we- obviously we make that known and try to meet those deadlines. But again, it's this attitude of, I'm in front of someone, I'm in front of a daughter of God or son of God, someone Jesus bought with the price of his blood. I am available, I'm interested in you. I'm a good listener- maybe that's one way of foot-washing. We all need to be listened to.

And it's not a one-way street. Peter would have switched roles with Jesus. But no, today I'm washing your feet, and we allow people to draw us out and to serve us and lift our spirits as well. So, it's

being, let's say, being totally interested in people and conveying the truth, many times moral truth. These are very tense issues. They shouldn't be, but they are. They're like life issues, issues of sexual morality, dignity of life. These are very charged issues, they're galvanizing topics, that we speak the truth in charity. We don't violate dignity. We are clear but we're kind and we're understanding. We don't judge someone's heart, but we do disclose that truth to charity. And St. Josemaria was such a believer in that that he had a stained glass made quoting in Latin St. Paul's phrase in his Letter to the Ephesians, "Speak the truth in charity."

And, perhaps I could wind down the prayer reading a couple of points in *The Way* for our conclusion of our meditation, invoking the Blessed Mother, the greatest human being who live charity. Jesus was a divine person, so she's the greatest human being, greatest human person. St. Joseph probably a close second. Anyway, I read, "If I don't see you practice that blessed- brotherly spirit that I preach to you constantly, I will remind you of those loving words of St. John: 'My dear children, let us love not in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.'" And then lastly, "Charity consists not so much in giving as in understanding. That's why you should seek an excuse for your neighbor. There are always excuses if yours is the duty to judge."

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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