

Some years ago, I presided at the funeral liturgy of a long-time faithful parishioner. After the funeral a man came up to me to thank me for leading the beautiful liturgy. He identified himself as a pastor in a local Christian church and a friend and neighbor to the deceased. In the course of our brief conversation, he commented that “You Catholics have it all over us at funerals. You have these beautiful symbols and rituals which offer such comfort to the mourners. We only have words.”

Take a moment to think about the role of ritual in our lives. We have the routine-type rituals we encounter regularly. This could be how we make our coffee or tea in the morning, or how we need to prepare to feel ready for work or school. It could be what we do on the weekends or times of rest to re-center ourselves. We probably don’t pay much attention to the rituals in our lives, from the everyday to the special, and how they ground us.

The **sacred** rituals we celebrate as Catholics might also feel deeply familiar. We celebrate the Eucharist... often. A baptism may not happen every week, but it also feels recognizable, as does a funeral liturgy. But the washing of the feet, which is at the center of our Gospel tonight, might not seem so common.

Before celebrating the Passover, Jesus knew what he was about to do for his disciples—the cross awaited him. But before that, he gets up from the meal, takes off his outer garment, takes a towel and basin, and begins to wash their feet. As much as this ritual is unfamiliar to us, it would not have been unfamiliar to the disciples. In their time, it was an act of hospitality to be welcomed into a home and have your dusty feet washed. But the act was always done by a servant. That is the part that would have confounded the disciples—that Jesus was acting like a servant. And why?

Amid the mystery and the confusion, Jesus gives a very clear answer. *If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.* Jesus washes the feet of the disciples because of his love for them, and he asks his disciples, and us, to show the same love for one another.

Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples was *a deliberate choice*. And although we do not have foot washing at every liturgy like tonight's, we do carry out its meaning anytime we do a service for others. We follow Jesus' model when we feed the hungry, when we offer a compassionate ear to someone who is struggling, and even when we offer *just our presence* to someone going through a difficult time. This is particularly relevant tonight, the first day of the Triduum, as we prepare to remember and celebrate how Jesus laid down his life for us. Tonight, let us consider how we can offer our lives, in a smaller way to be sure, but in a very real way, by accompanying those in need.

God is total, self-emptying love. That fundamental truth is revealed to us in Jesus' action of washing the disciples' feet and in giving himself to us in the Eucharist. May we be open to receiving this love and passing it along to all those God places in our lives.