

Sermon by Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia
Based on Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Maundy Thursday, April 21 2011

Between suitcases, shopping bags and storage boxes we continue our journey from Lent into Holy Week. This evening we gather in worship to pray, to sing, to listen to the old stories of our faith, to follow the path that guides us in the experience of being disciples of Jesus Christ. We also hear the story in the Old Testament about the liberation of the Jewish people.

Both the Gospel and the Old Testament stories contain instructions. The Gospel speaks about service, humility and love. The Old Testament speaks about readiness, and the need to travel light. Both stories carry a sense of urgency. The Jews are preparing to leave slavery; Jesus is eating the last Supper before his death.

This night is about getting readyâ Ready to leave, ready to eat while preparing for a journey, having a foot out of the house while a hand grasps a piece of bread on the table. Ready to say the last words, the words that matter. Ready to make a gesture that will last forever.

This night is about being ready to leave behind what is circumstantial and to focus on what is essential. It is about emptying our emotional and cognitive luggage so we can create space for the new lessons Jesus wants to teach us.

The lessons from Jesus this evening are love, service and humility. The physical expression is the washing of the feet.

This is an odd but simple way Jesus uses to teach us how to follow him. Odd because for many of us, washing somebody else's feet is not a usual activity. But for Jesus culture it was not strange, on the contrary, it was a sign of welcoming guests properly. What was strange is that this service was done only by slaves, foreign slaves; a Jewish slave was not supposed to perform such a service according to rabbinic prescriptions.

The disciples were shocked with Jesus proposition. That is the reason why Peter reacted so strongly saying, 'I will never let you wash my feet'. What a silly guy! He did not even grasp what it meant to follow Jesus. Jesus answer had even more impact then his proposition, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'

Because of this threatening answer, old bible scholars and some fathers of the church understood the footwashing as a type of sacrament with strength to purify sins. Some related it to baptism and/or to the Holy Supper. In some churches in Galia and Italy it became a rite added to baptism. It has also been suggested that the footwashing was the rite of ordination of the disciples. (Lohmeyer)

Jesus words are serious, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' These words are saying that if we don't receive Jesus humility, his way of loving, we have no share with him.

The word humility comes from the Latin humilis which means on or near the ground, low. Humilitas is the nearness to the ground, lowness. And from the same family root the word humus - ground, earth, soil. So to serve one another in humility and love has to do with the ground. It has to do with going all the way down; but going all the way down, not to be stepped upon or trampled, but to be close to our origins and roots, to be grounded. Humility is not about allowing somebody else to push you down, but it is about knowing where you are grounded.

To serve one another in humility and love has to do with responding to the other person's need recognizing that this response is our own need. We need to serve. We are called to do so. This is our vocation; it is part of who we are. God created this need for us. We don't serve because we are superior to the other. We serve

because we are planted. We serve to be who we are.

Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!'

I invite you to repeat with Simon Peter (please, repeat after me):

'Lord,
not my feet only
but also my hands and my head!'
(3 times)