

29th March 2018 (Holy Thursday, Year B)

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14; Psalm 115(116):12-13,15-18; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Today we start the celebration of the great Easter Triduum, three days that speak to us of God's great love. While the first reading from the book of Exodus gives us the context within which the Last Supper happened, a celebration of the Jewish passover, in the gospel we read of Jesus' great love. The gospel passage opens with the beautiful words: 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (Jn 13:1).

Jesus has always loved those who were his own, from the beginning, now he loved them to the end! The community of John, listening to this gospel the first time, would have asked: who is referred to as 'his own?' In the first instance they were the disciples, those who believed in his word and followed him. The community of John would have also recognised themselves, they too have believed in Jesus and were following him! For us who listen to this gospel today, like the community of John, we need to place ourselves among those who were 'his own;' we too have heard God's call in our Baptism, we have responded in faith, and are following Jesus as faithful disciples.

Jesus loved his disciples and loves also us, and in order to show this he washes their feet. This action must have shocked the disciples. Normally a slave or servant would have offered to wash the hosts' feet, at a time when people walked barefoot or in sandals in dusty roads, this was a very lowly service. Worse still, within a Jewish context, slaves could not be asked to wash their master's feet! Yet Jesus stood up, took off his outer garment, and wearing only a loin cloth and the towel wrapped around his waist, he kneels in front of his disciples and washes their dirty feet! God himself kneels in front of us to minister to us; this Jesus did on the cross!

The washing of the feet of the disciples happens during the Last Supper when Jesus also gives them his body and blood as food and drink. There is an intrinsic link between both actions: when we eat and drink of the body and blood of Jesus, like him, we too need to offer service to our sisters and brothers. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the greatest love but this love needs to become visible in the way we minister to each other. If God himself was prepared to humble himself and take on the form of a slave for us to show us the extent of his love, how much more should we be ready to serve one another – not only those we love, but all our sisters and brothers.

As we enter these three special days in our annual calendar; as we reflect on God's greatest love for each one of us individually and as a community of believers; as we prepare ourselves to renew our baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil; let us reflect on how we wash each other's feet. How do we offer welcome and service to one another in our community and beyond. Am I ready to get out of my comfort zone, take off my outer garment, and dressed as a slave do the most menial service to those who need my help. God loved me so much that he gave his life for me, how do I live this service in my daily life?

Fr Mario