

## Fr Brian Traynor Homily 2021

Holy Thursday...

A few years ago the Committee organizing a parish mission sent me a sample of brochure they intended to use. I asked them to use a different image of Jesus than one they had chosen. I requested the change, not to imagine that we know what Jesus looked like, but to highlight that a pious image of Jesus does not square with anything we read in the gospels about him.

Continually in the gospel we hear Jesus tell stories that shocked the religious leaders and gave hope to the many people who had become outsiders or outcasts. Jesus' message of the humility of God has been largely ignored by many Christian leaders.

For a variety of reasons, including COVID restrictions, we have prepared people for the washing of the feet in the liturgy tonight, but Jesus did not prepare the disciples. They did not expect him to wash their feet. They were shocked!

Did they understand that God was present in the poor and the powerless? Did they understand that God was little interested in rewarding people for what they had done but very interested in providing what they needed? They had heard Jesus speak and act to confirm this. As far as Jesus was concerned, unless people knew this, they would always misunderstand God and what God wanted from them.

The streets of the time were dusty, and wearing sandals resulted in dusty dirty feet. For that reason, it was normal that guests had their feet washed as an act of hospitality when they arrived at a house, but this was done by a servant or the youngest person in the household. It was something a Rabbi or priest would never do. This is why Peter objected to Jesus' action. He found it hard to be served. "I will never let you wash my feet", Peter said.

Have you ever said something like that to God? "I will never let you come down out of the clouds; I will never let you be seen in the homeless, in the drug-addict, in the homosexual, in the prostitute, in the divorced, in the refugee, or in the Muslim? We have all heard and read the gospel stories many many times. Jesus' disciples saw and

heard his actions many times too. But they still did not get it. Maybe sometimes we don't either. Story:

I heard just a few days ago about a Catholic woman who attended the funeral of a 19 year old who had been killed in a motor bike accident. The boy's father had separated from his mother about twelve months earlier, and six months ago before the accident, the father had begun to live with another woman. As the coffin was being taken from the church this woman attending the funeral said to the father "See. You got what you deserved.

Jesus cautioned Peter, "If you will not let me be like this; you can never be a disciple of mine". That woman at the funeral showed why she cannot be Jesus' disciple, even though she thinks she is.

Do we hear that threat spoken to us too? We can't ignore how God wants to be God – not a God of success, power and importance, but a God who stands with and washes the feet of the little people?

We know that Pope Francis has washed the feet of prisoners and women both when he was an Archbishop and since he has been Pope. He has washed the feet of Muslim women. There are some church officials especially priests, who think this is scandalous. Some bishops have instructed their priests if they won't include women having their feet washed, they should leave out the ritual! As a result, some priests have dropped the washing of feet from the Holy Thursday liturgy! It is obviously not just Canberra that has a problem dealing properly with women!

What is it that can block our understanding of Jesus so profoundly? Jesus preached and practiced inclusion. He invited his followers to make room in their hearts for everyone and to stand on the side of the weakest and lowest in society. He believed this was not possible if people tried to dominate others. For him, Justice is not achieved by repaying debts, but by providing for people's needs, and those with the greatest needs, need the greatest love.

When Peter heard that he could not be a disciple of Jesus unless he allowed himself to identify with the poor and the weak, he responded: "wash my head as well as my feet". In other words, "I'm in, boots and all".

Tonight as begin this journey to Easter, let us make a similar faith declaration, not based on the creed, but on our willingness to let God be God – the God who shows that weakness, failure, sin and even death are no barrier to life with God. Rather, the whole earth community is called to live in solidarity.

The central point of Jesus life was to reveal the divine in human form. It was too much for some people that God could love a leper, or a blind man or a Samaritan or a son who rejected his father. How could they see this weakness as God's power?

We must look through the lens of tonight's gospel. Because here – on his knees before his friends, his head lowered in humility and in love, Jesus was doing the work of a slave – here is where you see the true image of Jesus who says to us... "I have done this as an example for you. You must learn to wash the feet of one another".

And that is the point. We are not called to admire Jesus, but to imitate him.