

Pope Francis is certainly giving us a visible model of servanthood. One of the titles for the Pope is *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God. Servanthood, of course, is perfectly modeled by Jesus.

The foot washing scene is symbolic of Jesus' whole life, of the Incarnation itself. St. Paul tells us in Phil. 2:6 "Though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross". Jesus, though God, reduced Himself to the form of a slave. God becomes the servant of mankind.

In ancient times, foot washing was the work of the slave. In fact, it was the task of the lowest of the slaves, the slave of the slaves. Christ's servanthood of humanity then achieves its ultimate expression and fulfillment on the cross: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, death on a cross." On the cross, the glory of Jesus is seen, the glory of God becoming the servant of humanity.

Christ Jesus wishes us to share in this glory, to share in His glory, but a share in His glory can only be had by us if we share His servanthood. Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* explains that we become a servant by allowing ourselves to be transformed from within. When we are baptized, Christ begins a new life in us, His life. And this life, the life of Christ Himself, is meant to grow within us as we live the Christian life, as we pray and receive the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. As we are transformed more and more into Jesus, then our actions should resemble more and more His actions – the actions of Christ the servant. That is why He says to His disciples tonight "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you also must do," and still further in another place, Jesus says to the disciples "He who believes in me will also do the works I do and greater works than these He will do, because I go to the Father."

As we are transformed from within by the Lord, our vision of servanthood – our own servanthood – with Jesus goes through stages of growth. Many – even many Christians – never have the understanding of themselves as servants in the model of Jesus. They lock themselves in to their own world. They do maybe what they have to do for others for the sake of expectations, but they never go beyond that. All of us, at times, can be prone to this mindset.

But, please God, as Christ's life grows more in us, we begin to see that we are called to serve and in a deeper stage of growth we may begin to pull out of our own little world. We begin to understand that there is an obligation to live our lives more fully in service to others if we are to follow Jesus, if we are to let His life grow in us. But in this stage, much of our serving of others can be seen by us as an obligation, something that I must do, not something that I necessarily want to do, although there can certainly be moments of true charity. This stage is not bad, but it is immature.

As Christ's life grows in us, please God, then we reach a fuller stage of servant hood – one in which we not only feel that we have to serve, but one in which we want to serve. This willingness to offer our lives in service to others, this willingness not to count the cost of being a servant, opens up new vistas of love to us. Indeed, it is here in the place of total willingness to lay down our lives that we are able to come to know more and more who Jesus truly is, because Jesus begins to make our hearts like His, a heart that looks for the poor, the marginalized, the unnoticed, the forgotten, the lonely. A heart that takes time for people.

It is said that when Mother Teresa was talking to someone, it was as if no one else existed in the world but that person. Pope Francis has chosen in the first few days of his pontificate to offer mass each day for the Vatican workers who maybe have jobs that aren't so noticed – gardeners, janitors, housekeepers, and tonight instead of a grand Holy Thursday Mass at St. Peter's Basilica (although there is nothing wrong with that) he celebrated Holy Thursday Mass in a juvenile prison in Rome where he washed the feet of 12 prisoners.

These are reflections of the servant-heart of Jesus – a heart which Jesus wishes to give all of us.

- A heart that's willing to suffer pain because of service.
- A heart that's willing to be inconvenienced by service.
- A heart that's willing to put one's own agenda and plan aside for the sake of service.
- The heart of Jesus the servant laying down His life, even to the cross.

On Holy Thursday night the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was doing. Peter even protested against it. Jesus had to explain it to them: "As I have done, so you must do". Jesus wishes to continue to explain it to us and even more than explain – to give us His own heart, the heart of a willing servant.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church on Holy Thursday, 2013.