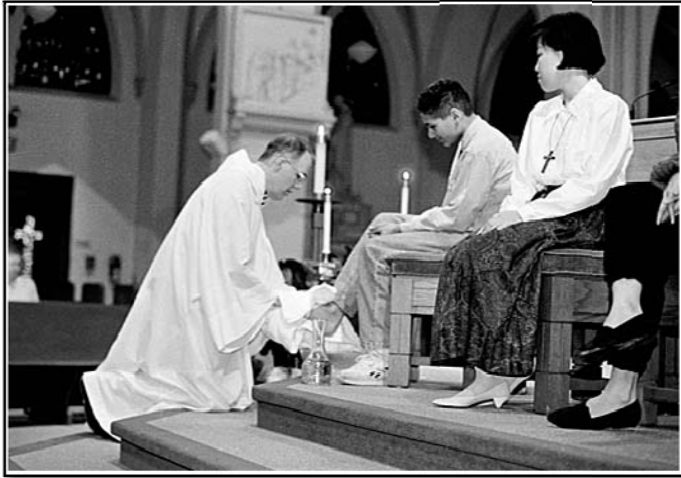


Week 27

Jesus Gives Us His Body and Blood

Guide: His Example, Broken and Given



This week we come to see and experience the ritual culmination of what Jesus' life has been about and what it will forever mean. For the one accused of "eating and drinking with sinners," this is his last supper on earth. This meal represents a way for us to remember and celebrate who he is for us. It is a covenant in his love that both nourishes us for our mission and gives us the example of servant love that marks our identity.

This week we go there to that scene to watch and listen. We become a part of the experience as a person in the scene. Like participants in the annual Passover memorial of the liberation

from slavery in Egypt, we enter this scene as though it were happening to us.

Jesus takes his life in his hands and gives it to us. So that we will never forget the meaning of his life for us, the bread of this meal is his body—taken, blessed, broken, and given. The wine is his blood—poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. When he says, "Do this and remember me," we know he wants us to never forget, but we also know he is calling us to be taken, blessed, broken, and given, that our lives might be poured out in service of others.

When he takes off his outer garment and wraps a towel around his waist, we can sense Jesus knows the time has come for him to fulfill his mission. As we let him wash our feet, the whole of our retreat, up to now, is summed up in this sign of his love for us. Our prayer to be with him in his mission is now granted as he lovingly gives us our mission in this example of his servant love. With him, we have become *transformed*—for others in the same way he is for us.

Throughout this week, from morning to night, in all the background times, the mystery of what it means to be broken and given, to be poured out in service to others, comes alive in our thinking, our desiring, and our gestures.

Use the resources this week for prayer and reflection. We pray to simply *be with Jesus*—so we might not miss the full power of his gift to us, so we can let it penetrate our hearts all week.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

We have come to a place in our journey where we can feel the effects of our praying, week after week, to see Jesus more clearly, to love him more dearly, that we might follow him more nearly, in our everyday lives. Our desire to be placed with Jesus, and the gifts of clarity about and freedom for his mission, come together in this contemplation of the Last Supper. He has shown us his life from the very beginning and invited us in, to understand and be attracted to his surrender to God, more and more. We are ready to be with him in the final days of his life. Our desire and prayer now is simply *to be with him, in compassion and love*, as he gives his life away for us.

We begin by reading the familiar accounts of the Last Supper. In the washing-of-feet scene, John paints a picture of the whole meaning of the Eucharist, the whole meaning of our discipleship, in one gesture that reveals the meaning of Jesus' gift of himself to us, as servant.

It is important that we let these powerful images become a part of the background of our lives this week. We will move through our week with the image of Jesus breaking bread with and passing a cup of wine around to his disciples. Perhaps with the photo of the Holy Thursday foot washing in our imagination all week, we will be very conscious of this image of Jesus as foot washer.

Throughout the week we can feel and express our gratitude. We can experience, in the midst of very hectic and messy times, a peace the world cannot give. All week—whether we are driving or walking from one place to another, or pouring a cup of coffee, or simply pausing to catch our breath—we can hear him say, “I have given you an example; do this in memory of me.” He is broken and poured out, to completely give himself to our very human struggle that we might be whole and ourselves become bread for our world. He washes our dirty feet to show us we need not hold any part of ourselves away from his loving touch, that we might not fear to touch others with his own gentle, compassionate embrace.

The more we let the concrete events and movements of our week connect with these mysteries, the more powerful this contemplation will become. Each meal, each act of generosity or service, each gesture of acceptance of another, each “yes” this week, can place us intimately back into these scenes for a moment of *union*.

Perhaps the reflection will be sealed with a special meal we plan with our family or loved ones. Perhaps we can plan to change our routine for an hour this week and reach out to touch, hold, comfort someone who needs it this week. Perhaps this week we will pause and put in writing our own “In These or Similar Words . . .” to express our gratitude.

Please consider sharing some experience, some grace this week, with others making the retreat. You can do this by going to the online Web page of the retreat and clicking on the *A Place to Share* link. The gifts we receive are given for the building up of the whole body of Christ.

Each morning and each night this week, we can begin and end each day with the assurance that the one who began this journey in us will bring it to fulfillment in the graces he desires to give us, for God's glory and the service of others.

For the Journey: “Do This in Memory of Me”

This week we are watching Jesus fulfill his Father's loving plan for him and ourselves. We are invited to listen in to an intimate discussion as he leaves the Last Supper he has with his close friends. In Luke 22:24, a slight argument arises about which of them will be the greatest. So human of them—and his response spins them around and ourselves as well.

The greatest ones usually sit at table and the lesser serve, “But I am among you as One Who serves.” He has said it; said that which he had lived all their days together.

We then turn to the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel and we see the Servant of God and humankind with a towel wrapped around him and kneeling before these friends, washing their feet. We pause with Jesus at the feet of Peter, who resists this humiliation. We watch the eyes of Jesus looking at his dear friend. Peter has followed Jesus from the humbling experiencing of Jesus telling him where and how to catch fish and has been confounded many times since. This might be too much though. Jesus invites him again to keep coming after him. “Let me wash your feet.”

The Servant is beginning his finest revelation in these final scenes of the great play of salvation. He has given them a simple way to remember him and his undying love in sharing with them the Bread of Life. He has also

given them a way to live that remembrance by inviting them to wash one another's feet in whatever manner that may be and to "do this in memory of me." The Servant is asking all his friends to follow him these days as he completes his ministry of loving all of humankind.

For us, these days are for very serious watching and listening. Ignatius invites us to come close and let our imaginations bring us prayerfully into Jesus' presence. We can be on our knees next to Peter or sitting at table breaking bread and remembering the great deeds of the Passover. We let him wash our feet, or maybe we, too, resist that gentle gesture of tenderness. Perhaps we join in the discussion about our own desires for greatness and not for being a servant at the table of his sisters and brothers.

In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Jesus,

"Lord, you can't mean me!" That's my reaction when I read the story of that last Passover meal with your friends. I am one of your friends, and as I sit around that table, so full of love and admiration for you, I feel disconcerted when you talk about one of us betraying you. "You can't mean me!" I want to call out along with Judas. How could I ever betray the one who loves me so endlessly?

I am so moved by your humanness at this meal. The story begins by saying how you had always loved your followers and you loved them until the end, and I feel it tonight, in such an intimate setting with you. You had loved us all, those who had followed you so closely from the beginning and those of us who hung back, waiting until we could be sure you were really going to save us.

Now all of us are gathered around your table, and you say that we, your closest friends, will betray you. How sad you look when you say that. How distracted you look as you think about the days ahead. I want to be with you in your apprehension and anxiety. I want to stay with you and support you, dear friend, because I sense your fears. Most of all, I want to reassure you that I won't betray you. Then you take off your cloak and begin to wash our feet. Please, Lord, not my feet! They are so smelly and dirty and my nails are ragged. I like to keep them hidden in my sandals, not exposed to anyone, especially you. But you are so gentle as you take my feet from where I have tucked them under my garment and wash them clean. The moment you bend deeply over my newly washed feet and kiss them, I realize that the places where I can let you love me the most deeply are the places where I am embarrassed, the parts I want to hide from others, my weaknesses.

You ask if we understand what you did. You have served us by washing our feet. Your kingdom is about service, not about being pampered. Do this for one another, you say. Finally, I think I am beginning to understand what you have been talking about for so long. It's about taking care of one another, washing one another's feet, and serving one another in the most humble of ways. You have anointed my feet with your kiss and sent me on this journey to follow in your footsteps.

Can I follow you? I'm not sure, Jesus. I know that I love you and want to be like you. I am afraid that I will betray you. And I know that as sad as this makes you, my failings are the places where I need you the most. That's where you will always be with me.

But tonight, let me be with *you*, dear friend. Let me sing a hymn with you as we end this most intimate dinner and walk out into the garden to pray. Let me hold your hand through this long night ahead. I feel your love for me so deeply and I feel your invitation to join you in this journey of serving others as you have.

Thank you for inviting me. I will stay awake with you, Lord.

Scripture Readings

Matthew 26:17–30

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

John 13:1–30

Psalm 116