

## Homily for Holy Thursday 2022

Hands and feet, this is a day of hands and feet. The hands of Christ wash the feet of his disciples; the hands of Christ take and share bread and wine, and pass them into the hands of his friends. The hands of Judas take the food and drink from Christ - the hands of Judas that so recently took hold of the thirty pieces of silver. The feet of Judas take him out of the room, out into the darkness, out into the night. The feet of the other eleven follow Christ, until it is too much and they run away. Hands and feet, hands and feet.

What an extraordinary sight it is, Christ on the floor in front of his friends, washing their feet. It is bordering on scandalous, the Son of God looking up from the floor into the faces of the men he has chosen, has taught, has trained; the few into whose care he will soon entrust the whole fragile mission. What frail people they are, prone to all the doubts and fears and anxieties that beset us all. With what love and tenderness he prepares those feet for betrayal and desertion. When Judas heads out into the night to betray the Lord, it will be on feet that are fresh and clean and fragrant from the washing. When the disciples sleep in Gethsemane, it will be with feet that are fresh from the washing, and when they run away and desert him, leaving him to Judas and the guards, it will be on feet that he had washed. What an extraordinary thing: Jesus prepares the feet of Judas for betrayal, prepares the feet of the others for flight. He gives them what they need to run away from him. Whatever can lie behind that?

St John tells us that Jesus had always loved his own, and now he 'loves them to the end'. That is to say, he loves them until the end of his life, until the Passion, until he is lifted up on the cross; but also he loves them so totally and so extremely that he will give them everything that they need to betray him, or to run from him. He does not choose to hold onto them, to grasp them in desperation, he will set them up for choice. Only a disciple who has freely chosen to follow the Lord is really a disciple. So he gives them clean feet with which to run, and leaves it up to them. And they do, of course, what we would have done: they run away (apart from Judas who does not need to run away as he has walked instead to betray the Lord). But those feet, which must for ever tingle with the wonder of being washed by the Son of God himself, will redeem themselves, because they will bring the disciples together once again when the Lord has risen. The feet that ran away from the arrested Jesus will run towards the risen Jesus. The choice, freely made, to run away will be undone a few days later.

What was it that brought them back? What was it that made them turn from running away, to running back? Primarily, of course, it was the news that the Lord had risen again. But there is more to it than that. What made them care so much was the fact that they knew how very deeply they were loved. They knew that they were 'loved to the end'. He loved them so much that he did what all wholehearted lovers do, he revealed himself to them completely, holding nothing back. Do you want to know who Jesus is? He is the one whose hands offer himself into your hands. He is the one who kneels at your feet to wash you. He is the one who gives you everything that you will need to betray him, or to run away from him, so that your choice can be an informed one, and a heartfelt one. He gives you complete freedom, his love for you will be exactly the same however you respond.

The lover reveals himself tonight as a servant, as one whose role in your life is to make it as easy as it can be to be the best that you can be. And to make it better still, he gives the gift of himself, offered to us in every Mass – a gift that he gave to the Twelve, knowing that one would betray him and the others would run away, but also knowing that the gift would outlast the running. It is a gift that survives the desertion, a gift that will sustain them for the rest of their lives.

Hands and feet. Hands that give, that wash; feet that receive, feet that flee. What of us? What of our hands and feet? There will, I'm afraid, be times that even though we have been washed and loved and gifted by the Lord, we still choose to run away. We wish it were not so, but we know ourselves well enough to be able to say that this is how it is. There will be times when our hands, so clearly shown to us tonight to be designed to give, to share, to serve, to wash are used to grasp, to cling, to acquire and to hold. This will disappoint us and disturb us, but the good news is that, even though we so misuse our hands and feet, the gifts we have been given will outlive and outlast our betrayal. Tomorrow the time will come for us to ask: what use can my hands, my feet, my life be in following the Lord's model of service, in helping others to be the best that they can be. But for now it is better simply to receive the gift, to treasure it, to adore it and to allow it to work in us its great transformation. He loves us, and will love us to the end.