

## **Christian Service Is Not Patronizing**

Holy Thursday

April 18, 2019

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Christianity is not just a set of doctrines, but a way of life. Sadly, some Christians get all the prayers right, but are less than thrilled about the service part. Service, for them, is just something secondary or additional. This isn't Christianity. Christianity, at its core, is prayer AND service.

For those who do embrace a life of service, however, there is another temptation that must be avoided. We must avoid giving the impression that we have something that other people need. At first, this may sound odd. Of course we, the givers, have something that the receivers don't have. We have money, resources, and skills. They need us to do something for them. But the fact of the matter is this isn't service. This is a form of control and manipulation in which we remain superior and they remain inferior.

Christian service, the service we are called to, is about being an equal with the ones we serve. It is not patronizing. As Jesus said in the Gospel after washing his disciples' feet: "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." The key is that Jesus purposely made himself an equal to his disciples. He approached them on the same level.

Phileena Heuertz, in her book on her own spiritual journey, writes, "meeting the needs of someone else may be kind, compassionate and even righteous, but it is, after all, a powerful gesture: *You have a need, and*

*I can meet that need. The reverse is in view during the Holy Thursday ceremony. This isn't an exhibition of the powerful doing something for the needy, but an expression of our common humanity, with the capacity to give and the need to receive." (Pilgrimage of a Soul, 38)*

*True Christian service is about making ourselves equal to those we serve so we can both give and receive.*

When I do service, do I see the other person as an equal?

Patronizing can be an injustice. When we do everything for the needy, they do not have the opportunities to take hold of their own lives. True Christian service is about giving, but also about receiving. It is when we recognize that while we have something to give, we are needy, too.

Through his incarnation, Jesus entered into our humanity as one of us. Tonight, the night before he was to die on the cross, he now says to us, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."