

Our Gospel today begins with Jesus washing the feet of the apostles. 2,000 years ago when shoes were not so common, people walked barefoot or with open sandals. At the end of a day, feet were quite dirty. In entering the home of another, it was an act of hospitality to wash the feet of a guest. This was most often taken care of by a servant as we hear of from the Book of Samuel: “Let your maidservant be the slave who washes the feet of my lord’s servants” (1 Sm 25:41).

In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus entered the home of a Pharisee to dine with him, the master of the house did not extend this courtesy to Jesus. But a sinful woman learning that Jesus was present began to bathe his feet with her tears. “Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment” (Lk 7:38). Jesus forgave her sins and she was all the more appreciative. The Pharisee points out her disreputable background and Jesus turns the table on the Pharisee. He chastises the host who did not offer the hospitality to Jesus and commends the woman who recognized Jesus and responded with the utmost respect.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus turns the table on the washing ritual once again. “By washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus, ‘the master and teacher’ (13:14), performs the degrading work of a slave.”ⁱ In dying on the cross for our sins, the master and teacher performs the salvific work of cleansing humanity from sin. Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Ph 2:7-8).

The apostles, especially Peter, had difficulty understanding this great act of humility. Jesus has to spell it out for them. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14). This washing of feet points to the cross. “Jesus’ cross brings cleansing from sin, and this cleansing power is communicated to believers through baptism.”ⁱⁱ

In Saint Catherine of Siena, who’s feast we celebrate today, we see many examples of a humble woman willing to serve the Lord by serving others.ⁱⁱⁱ

- She wanted to give herself entirely to God. At the age of seven she vowed to live a life for God as a consecrated virgin.
- With an intense prayer life, she learned to love the less fortunate as Jesus does. She cared for the sick, the poor, and the marginalized, especially lepers.
- The church was in schism with several illegitimate men claiming the title of pope. Catherine had the humility to speak truth to power and convinced Pope Urban to return to Rome and begin to wash the public sins of the church by restoring order to the papacy.
- The Lord graced Catherine with the gift of stigmata. In humility, she asked the Lord to hide them from others. In death at the age of 33, the wounds of Christ appeared on her incorruptible body.

God forgives our sins which is much more powerful than the mere washing of our feet. In turn, we are called to wash one another’s feet. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14). What miraculous things might you accomplish with God’s help as you follow his example?

ⁱ Martin, Francis; Wright, William M. IV. **The Gospel of John**. Pg. 234.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 235.

ⁱⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-catherine-of-siena-451