

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle B 2009

Deacon Pat Hall

Homilies help open Holy Scripture. Please read the Scripture selections of the day that the homily reflects upon. Click on the verse citations for the full readings.

[Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45](#)
or click on to:

<http://www.usccb.org/nab/readings/101809.shtml>

I hate people who hate people.

You can see that I am a work in progress.

But I have to tell you that nothing gets my hackles up more than to see arrogance. Some say that which bothers one most about others is sometimes that which lurks inside. If so, I am giving each of you, my St. Tom's brothers and sisters, the permission to burst my swollen head if I ever start to get full of myself and start pontificating instead of discovering. Seekers don't have time to be arrogant.

Last week, a parishioner was telling me about a conversation they had with someone they works with. This person is open about their alternative lifestyle, a lifestyle counter to my biases. I won't tell you what kind of lifestyle. I ask you to think of a lifestyle that you do not condone. (pause) OK, do you have it? Now think of another lifestyle or group that you don't condone, just so we have it all covered. If you are having difficulty, see me after mass and I'll give you a list of 6 or 7.

Well, our parishioner was having a casual conversation with a co-worker one day when the co-worker discovered that our parishioner was a Christian. The co-worker's response was, "You're a Christian? But... but, you're so nice!"

Can you imagine what that co-worker's experiences had been with Christians if there was surprise in finding a nice one?

Now, I may have biases about this or that group of people, but where do we get off not being nice? Where do we get off in "lording" it over others?

"Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all."

God is concerned about arrogance. In a word search of the Old and New Testaments, I found our inspired authors referred to humility, meekness, arrogance and pride over a dozen times a dozen times.

Jesus said we are to have a child's faith. (Luke 18:17). We are called to the meekness of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). Jesus demonstrated humble service in washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper (John 13).

Humility is core Jesus.

The image of Jesus washing the feet of Peter has become iconic for me. I have a statue of that scene in the narthex. It has always been an inspiration to me as I served in police work, as I serve as husband and father, and as I am at your service.

It was made an even more powerful image for me when I started here at St. Tom's. Every Holy Week on Thursday we have foot washing at St. Tom's. It is a Catholic tradition that the bishop or a pastor wash the feet of some selected parishioners in imitation of Jesus' action.

Well, here at St. Tom's, we do some major foot washing. You know Fr. Ken. If there is some action that is to signify God's extravagant grace... than it should be extravagant in the action... as many of you drenched ones have experienced in our sprinkling rite.

If you haven't been to a St. Tom's Holy Thursday mass, do come. All of the pastoral team members are set up at foot washing stations and everyone who wants comes forward, much like our communion lines. We have extra water stations for those families and friends who choose to wash each other's feet in love, humility and service.

It was moving when I first had my feet washed. It also provoked great feelings of love when I first rinsed your feet, dried them and sealed them with a kiss of servitude.

That experience set me up for one of those rare "a-hah!" moments years later.

It was at a daily communion service when we were at St. Tom's on the Park. The Gospel of the day was the very story of Jesus washing Peter's feet. Well, I noticed, like I had never before, that Jesus' washed all the disciples' feet...all twelve. That meant he washed Judas' feet! He washed Judas' feet full aware that Judas was going to betray him that very night. As Isaiah predicted, Judas' betrayal sent Jesus to that suffering that justified many, that bore all our guilt. How could anyone act with that love and intimacy towards the one who was about to send him to the cross? That is core Jesus! And don't think that because he was the Son of God, that that would have made it easier for him. As the Letter to the Hebrews spoke to us today, he sympathized with our weaknesses and was similarly tested in every way. He chose not to sin. He chose to love Judas.

You know that statue out there of Jesus washing Peter's feet? For me, I now see Jesus washing Judas' feet. That is the model of relationship to which Jesus calls me.

Whose lifestyle don't I condone? How am I to serve them? Nicely would be a nice start.

I shared this “a-hah” story with our newest class of deacon candidates. I was their instructor for Catholic Social Tradition. One of their final exams was to ponder on: “Whose feet would it be difficult for me to wash?” Candidates for the diaconate come with a wide range of opinions, theological perspectives and convictions. Yet they are to serve all. I told them their answers may be intensely personal, maybe more personal than I had a right to know. I asked them to engage their spiritual directors in the conversation and then just to let me know they had done so.

As this is a student parish, I feel free to assign you the same homework.

Whose feet would it be difficult for you to wash?

Is there someone you trust with whom you can share that conversation? It would be well worth the effort, that is if you have the same hope of James and John to be close to Jesus.

There are people whose feet it would be difficult for me to wash. If I had to solely rely on my own efforts, I do not think I would ever be able to do so. Thank God my life isn't dependent on my efforts. God gives himself. God gives himself here. Just as Jesus was infused with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that comes from the Father's and the Son's love, we may be able to love Judas.

Someday, with God's grace, I hope to be able to say with clean heart:

“I love people...especially the imperfect ones!”