

Holy Thursday

John 13: 14-15. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.



Bernie Tholl is a husband, father and grandfather. He is a lector, serves on the Worship Commission, CAFÉ (Catholic Adult Formation and Education) team, and was instrumental in starting the HUP (Helping Unemployed People) ministry.

After retirement, my wife Rosie and I moved to Michigan from the Chicago area to be closer to our daughters and grandchildren. While I lived in Chicago I was active on my parish's Worship Commission and on the Pastoral Council. My wife and I started the HUP ministry while we were there. We've been members of St. John Parish for the past four years and love being involved here.

The first time this entire passage really hit me was when a priest in Chicago asked me to have my feet washed on Holy Thursday. I first thought, "No!" Then I thought, "There's Peter all over again." Having your feet washed is a very humbling experience. It put me in my place, so to speak. That was the beginning of my experience with this passage. The night that I got my feet washed was significant. I knew the priest very well. When he washed my feet he looked up at me and we both had tears in our eyes.

Later, I realized that if Jesus had done this for others, we had to do it, too. To understand what Jesus was doing, we need to understand the history of his time. We know that in Jesus' time there were no nice roads and sidewalks. People walked everywhere and it was very dusty. It fell to the lowliest servants in the household to wash the feet of those who were entering to visit. Jesus took that role, getting down on his knees to wash the feet of his disciples. Jesus is telling us that even though he is the greatest, the teacher, he was putting himself in the role of the lowliest servant. That realization of the responsibility we have of taking care of one another began to grow inside me.

That's why my wife and I took on the responsibility of helping the unemployed in Chicago. We have been able to offer our experience to again help others here in Michigan. Our journey has come full-circle.

The icing on the cake was the time I attended a conference and was reminded about the importance of this Scripture. We were given this image: Every morning we are given a fresh bowl of water that we carry with us throughout the day. It is

our responsibility to wash the feet of all those we meet that day, no matter who they might be. It doesn't matter who it is, whether it is our partner, our spouse, the people at work, or a stranger on the street. It doesn't matter, we just need to take care of them.

This whole journey led me to reflect on the life of Jesus. If we look at Scriptures, we will see that Jesus' whole mission involves taking care of others. We see this in his feeding the hungry, curing the sick, raising the dead, letting the little children come to him. It's all about taking care of each other. Each person has value. When we wash the feet of another, we need not look above their ankles. Christ is present in all of us: rich or poor, single, married, young or old.

At the end of the day, that bowl of water should be really dirty! After I die, the Lord isn't going to wonder what kind of house I lived in or what kind of car I drove, or how much money I had in the bank. These things aren't important. What I will be asked is whether I washed the feet of those with whom I came in contact.

Jesus will ask us about the Beatitudes, about feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked and sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. If we have taken care of our neighbors he will say, "Enter into the kingdom!"

That's why Holy Thursday is so important to me. I still get tears in my eyes when I see Father wash the feet of others. I see Jesus doing that for his disciples. All the celebrations during the Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil are so important. It is our history. It's our life and our salvation.

I'm so gratified in the fact that St. John Church has a vision of taking care of others into the future. We're involved in the North End Soup Kitchen, Christian Service and Outreach East, and now we have the HUP ministry. There is very real concern for the welfare of those who live in this area. Our parish is trying to live the gospel message of taking what we have learned from the Eucharistic table and putting it into practice out in the world. We take that responsibility seriously. We do not fulfill our obligation to the Lord by simply attending mass on Sunday. When we finish each mass we are told, "Go! Take this message to the world." Live what you've just celebrated. Live what you have just done. Augustine says, "Become what you eat." We must pay attention to all the issues of social justice.

Do you have a couple of hours to spend helping our neighbors at the North End Soup Kitchen? You can find more information by calling the parish at 653-2377.

St. John will celebrate Holy Thursday Liturgy of the Lord's Supper at 6:30 p.m. on March 20, 2008. Please join us for this liturgy and all of the Sacred Triduum.

You can learn more about CAFÉ by contacting Elaine Ouelette at:
euquette@stjohndavison.org

If you would like help in posting your resume on line or if you would like to be part of HUP (Helping Unemployed People) ministry, please call Bernie Tholl at 810-245-8559 or e-mail him at rlt1146@aol.com

If you are in need of food, clothing and financial assistance, please contact St. John Christian Service at 653-7725 or Outreach East at 653-7711.