

“Love till the end” John 13:1-17

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:1-17)

Today is the day, when we pay special attention to the Lord's Supper. It is interesting that in today's Gospel reading we didn't hear too much about it.

However, we heard a lot about Jesus. And that is also true that we cannot understand the Lord's Supper unless we understand what kind of person the Lord of this Holy meal is.

Let us take a look what today's Gospel teaches us about Jesus Christ, and I hope that we'll also gain a better understanding about the Lord's Supper.

We read that “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

“Knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, [He] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

We know that this was a wonderful act of humility and service. Sometimes churches try to imitate it. But often we don't know a bit of what His disciples experienced. They were truly shocked. Why?

We have heaps and heaps of written testimonies, of old manuscripts, which allow us to understand the culture of that day. The washing of the feet was considered as the most demeaning task. This was a task of slaves; not even all slaves. The Jews strongly opposed the idea that Jewish slaves could perform this act, it was assigned only to gentile slaves.

Among all the wealth of sources we have, there is not a single, not even a one occurrence of a situation where any person had washed the feet of someone who was lower than he. There are situations when disciples had washed the feet of their masters, or someone had washed the feet to his peers as a sign of extraordinary love. But there is never... never ... even a single occurrence where teacher and master had washed the feet of His disciples.

But this is exactly what Jesus was doing. Knowing the cultural context – this is not a surprise that his disciples were shocked. Most of them swallow it silently, but Peter, as always, had something to say. ““Lord, are you going to wash my feet?!”

He objected as strongly as possible. There is no way you are going to do it!

All the disciples, observing what Jesus was doing, were thinking in social and cultural categories. This was very uneasy moment for them. Their master, the one whom they were hoping to be long awaited Messiah, He is humiliating Himself to the extent of washing their feet.

Jesus understood their shock and said: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

He was showing His love – as John wrote, he was showing *it till the end*, it means – without reservations. To all of them. Even to Judas Iscariot, who already was about to betray Him. This is how God loves us, without reservations, regardless of what kind of people we are, regardless of what we have done or have left undone.

Jesus knew that Father had given all things into His hands, that all the authority was given to Him, and this is how He used it, this is what He did - emptied Himself for us. For all of us.

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All what Jesus disciples understood to be of high value in this world was challenged by what Jesus did. All what our culture understands to be of high value is challenged in the same way.

Washing His disciples' feet Jesus was living out what He said He had come to do: "I didn't come to be served, but to serve..." His disciples didn't realize yet, what they will realize after a few days, that this humility was of a piece from Jesus death on the Cross.

Besides we need to pay a close attention at how Jesus calls His suffering and death. Jesus calls them *glorification*. The glorification of the Father and the glorification of the Son. That is the way how God understands what the true glory is. His sacrificial love towards each of us, love that cares about others. Love that is ready to serve up to the point of giving one's life for the good of others; His life for our good.

Jesus' disciples were not much different from us. If we were present at this dinner, He would have washed our feet. God... man... King... Lord... Holy One.. innocent... loving us sacrificially.. on His knees before us... We are His disciples, and that is the attitude we receive from our God and Saviour.

What does it mean for us? Does it bring some changes into our life? Jesus said: "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

We are not larger than our Lord. We are not larger than our Teacher. If He did it for us, we ought to do it for one another. He, being God, humbled Himself to serve us. Before Him we all are equal. How could we justify not serving one another? Serving to one another is not even close to what He did for us.

If someone has hurt us, how could we not forgive them? If someone is devising against us, how could we not serve them? If we have sinned against others – how could we dare not to go and ask for forgiveness? Blessed we are if we do so.

If we are His disciples, we have to try to live the life He wanted us to live. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

This may seem quite simple at the first sight. Yes, we Christians try to love one another, of course. Especially in our congregations. Unless there are those whom we don't

like, or unless there are those who think differently than we do, or unless there are those who dislike us, or those who are not very friendly and good people anyway.

Jesus washed Judas feet. He knew that Judas was about to betray Him, and still ... He did it. We do not speculate what reaction we will receive from those, whom we are called to love. The love which Jesus expects from us is not conditional. It is not about – “you go and love those who love you”.

No, it is about - “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mat 5:44-48)

These are very heavy words, very heavy. We all know that Jesus is asking something impossible. We are not Him. We are not capable of loving and serving someone who is about to deliver us to death. Sometimes we are not capable of loving even those, who look at us in a way we don't like it. Our God knows us too well.

First, we need to clarify that the love that Jesus is talking about is not the love as our culture often understands it. It is not about having this nice, warm feelings, or passion towards someone. In the Bible the love is about doing, not about feeling. This is what Jesus is commanding us. Go and love your enemies, meaning, go and do the best for them.

People can be our enemies only if we look to them through human eyes. As soon as we bring Jesus into this picture, they are the beloved children of God, they are the ones for whom Jesus gave His life. Of course, they are corrupted and distorted by sin, as we all are, but not our enemies. We need to see and love them as Jesus did. As His own people.

We ought to, but we cannot. It is not enough to hear the command – go and love! We don't have the power within us to serve those, whom we don't like. Our God knows it. He Himself provides the solution. There is such power outside of us. The power which enables us to be humble, where our pride objects. The power which enables us to pray for our enemies, when we want to curse them. This power is given to us in the Lord's Supper with the body and blood of Jesus.

Jesus put down all His power to serve as the lowest one among us. Doing it, He got all the power. By His humility He changed this world. He became the most influential person who has ever lived. We are called to follow His example; to transform the hearts and minds of those around us, the people in our life by loving them unconditionally and without expectations of mutual benefit.

Today is the day when we focus our attention on the Lord's Supper. "This is my body which is *for you*. Do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1Co 11:24-25)

Every time, when we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are joined with Christ; not just by our faith and spiritually, but also physically. We receive the same body and the same blood which He gave unto the death so that we can live.

He sacrificed Himself so that we can have the life, the forgiveness and the salvation. He comes to us and is present in this live-giving flesh and blood. He transforms our crooked will and makes us to desire what He desires.

He instituted the Lord's Supper so that He can continue to strengthen us to do His will. We are not alone in this task of loving one another, He is with us.

We also need to remember that our salvation doesn't depend on how well we perform. We have already received it. We can only thank God by loving others and helping them to receive a bit of this love that we have received from our Lord.

The word "remember" in the Bible means something different than just mental activity. In the Bible the remembrance is always closely linked with an action. If you remember, it calls you to action. In the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus, God and man, who lived, died, and rose again - *for us*. When we remember Him, receiving His Holiness and life, we are, indeed, enabled to live out what He called us to do.

When we remember Him, we go and live for our neighbours. We love those who don't deserve our love and love them in such a way that this is the strongest testimony to the all peoples. The testimony that there is a God, who really changes hearts and minds, God who really enables us to love our enemies, God who empowers us to serve others in a way that is shocking for this world.

There is this God, who have loved us first, when we were still in our sins, who died for us, when we were still His enemies, who today gives us His life transforming holy body and blood, even if we are still struggling to love one another.

Let us remember it.

Amen.