

HOLY THURSDAY

April 9, 2020

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once wrote that although we have Jesus' example of the washing of the apostles' feet as a model of service and love, it is difficult to find people today fighting for the towel. Is it true of us? What are some of the "lowly" jobs at home and at work that we avoid because we feel they are "beneath" our dignity?

Few incidents in the gospel story reveal the character of Jesus and so perfectly show his service and love to his disciples. At this last hour, Jesus wants to leave those he loves, and has lived with, an essential message. He wants to show them in action the symbolic gesture underlying his whole life: that of a servant. He takes on a dress and function of a servant and washes the feet of the apostles. Peter was amazed and had difficulty in understanding the humility of his Master and Lord.

Jesus knew all things had been given into his hands. He knew that his hour of humiliation was near, but he knew that his hour of glory was also near. Such a consciousness might well have filled him with pride; and yet, with the knowledge of the power and the glory that were his, he washed his disciple's feet. At that moment when he might have had supreme pride, he had supreme humility. Love is always like that.

When, for example, someone falls ill, the person who loves him will perform the most menial services and delight to do them, because love is like that. Sometimes men feel that they are too distinguished to do the humble things, too important to do some menial tasks.

Jesus was not so. He knew that he was Lord of all, and yet he washed his disciples' feet.

Here is a simple story, a story so simple that it repeats itself among us all, at this time of year. Told by Mary Tonneman –here is her story word for word.

"On Holy Thursday, as our parish priest tucked a towel around his waist in preparation for washing the feet of twelve parishioners, a vision of another man flashed before my eyes. I have seen another man tuck a towel around his waist many times, preparing to cook for his large family, to bathe the children, wash dishes ... whatever needed to be done. A very ordinary man with gentle hands who could remove the tangles from a little daughter's hair, clean up a skinned knee, remove an "ouchy" splinter. A loving man, a loving father.

Once I saw him getting ready to scrub the huge aluminum trays in the kitchen of a local restaurant whose owner had generously given it over to fellow parishioners for a fund raising breakfast. As the man was scrubbing away, a waitress stopped by, looked down and said, "That's not a man's job!" The man kept on working with quiet dignity.

Now in his senior years, he continues to be a thoughtful "servant" by doing the heavy housework, washing dishes, anything to help lighten the load.

I know where my husband of 40 years gets his quiet dignity. As I discovered on that

Holy Thursday, he has been imitating Jesus.”

This story is a living example of what Jesus did in the Gospel. It is a living example of what he means in another gospel when he says, “*Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*” It is a living example of what Jesus means when he says, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.*” It is a living example of the power and the beauty of the virtue of humility when lived courageously in a truly Christian life.

Jesus wants those he loves and who are near to him, to become servants in their turn: to render service with humble love. This is the invitation of Jesus that holds out to you and to me in the Mass of Holy Thursday.

Let's close by reflecting prayerfully on these inspiring words about humility in the letter of St. Paul to the Hebrews: “*My sons and daughters: conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble (yourselves) more, the greater you are, you will find favor with God.*”