

## On Holy Ground Holy Thursday



This meditation for Holy Thursday, the beginning of our Triduum is in two parts. Part 1 has three prayer movements. The first uses the Gospel text of the washing of the feet. The second invites you to remember celebrations of Holy Thursday in former years and the third

asks you to bring your experiences of the present day to this time of prayer. Feel free to pray with these thoughts and questions throughout the day. Part II has a single prayer movement that flows from the supper to the Garden of Gethsemane.

## Part 1

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.

He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over.

So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered and said to him,

"What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later."

Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."

Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."

Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all."

For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.

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."

### Praying with Scripture

As you read through the passage above, are you able to imagine this last supper scene? Who is at the table?

Traditionally, we think of the Last Supper as being solely for Jesus and the twelve. In your prayer, do you see others there? Perhaps, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Magdalene, Martha, Mary, Lazarus? Are there children there? How do you image this final meal in your prayer? John's version of this meal does not include the familiar words of Jesus identifying the bread and wine with his body and blood. You may want to bring these familiar words and images into your prayer. (They are included in Paul's letter that is the second reading.) Can you imagine yourself as one of those around the table? What are the feelings you recognize

in yourself as you hear Jesus' words, "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for the many." Are you shocked, confused, wondering what he means? And when he removes his garments and begins to wash your feet, do you identify with Peter and resist this gesture of service and intimacy, or do you let yourself "lean into" the experience?

You are invited to take some time to engage in a "colloquy" or conversation with Jesus. What is it that you want to say to him in this poignantly beautiful moment of self-gift and service? How do you respond to the question he asks all of the disciples, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"

When you have finished this time of prayer, we suggest you keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings? Were there moments of consolation where you felt animated by the Spirit of God? Were there feelings of desolation where you felt more absence than presence?

### Praying a Memory

Can you remember a liturgical experience of Holy Thursday that engaged you with its power and beauty? Memory is always at the center of Eucharist, as it is for our Jewish brothers and sisters who continue to remember God's faithfulness in the Passover. Let your memory recreate a Holy Thursday Eucharist from the past. Who was the community with whom you gathered? What did the Church look like? How was it decorated? Can you smell the incense,

see the elements of bread, wine and sacred oils carried in procession? Can you remember the sounds of voices proclaiming the word? Can you hear again the community singing throughout the liturgy? Do you remember some elements of the homily? How was the washing of the feet done? Did the whole community participate or only a fixed number? Was the Eucharistic prayer more “memorable” because of the context of this celebration? Do you remember processing to an altar of repose, kneeling before the Sacrament, singing, Tantum Ergo?

Who were the members of the faith community gathered with you? Can you see their faces and hear their voices? Will you bring your memory of a past celebration of Holy Thursday be an integral part of this year’s liturgy?

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### Praying the Present

In this prayer period, can you focus on the meaning of Jesus’ invitation to “wash each other’s feet, “and ask yourself, how you might actualize that “command” in your daily life? How do you hold in prayer those who are fleeing for their life because of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, or because of famine in Sudan, persecution, and violence of all kinds in so many places around the world? What does Holy

Thursday reveal to you about God's desire to deliver people from all forms of injustice and slavery? What do the mysteries we celebrate reveal about God who appears out of the burning bush to be a voice of liberation?

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## Holy Thursday Part II

Then going out, he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

When he arrived at the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not undergo the test."

After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test."

Following the supper, Jesus goes with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Luke's version of this story which we heard on Palm Sunday

emphasizes the intensity of Jesus' agony as he ponders what he will have to suffer. Luke's version of the story is very different from the Marcan version we heard last year. Here, the disciples share the suffering of Jesus, where in Mark, they are not aware of what he's going through. They are asleep, most likely from too much wine at dinner!

Using your imagination in prayer, can you visualize this "olive grove?" Are you immersed in the darkness? Are you wondering why you are there at this time of night? What are the feelings that arise in you as you hear Jesus' words and see him fall to his knees in prayer?

As you witness the suffering of countless people across the world, how might their experience of loss and grief be held in the experience of Jesus' agony in the garden? Speak to Jesus as one friend speaks to another. What words does he use to strengthen your faith when it is challenging to believe in God's care for this world subjected to such inhuman cruelty?