



HOLY THURSDAY

Jesus took a basin and filled it with water...

In recent months, water has been very much in the forefront of our minds. We have seen the ravages of drought; watched water douse deadly flames; witnessed torrential rain, uncontrolled flooding and king tides. Finally, while we are enjoying full catchments, green paddocks and flowing rivers, we are also aware that handwashing is the first line of defence against Covid-19.

Water is prominent also in the life of Jesus, e.g., He spoke of a 'cup of cold water' (Matthew 10:42), changed water into wine (John 2: 1-11); was baptised with water in the Jordan (Matthew 3:14); walked on water (Matthew 13: 22-23) and calmed the storm (Luke 8:22-25).

In the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, Matthew, Mark and Luke emphasise the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. John concentrates instead on the washing of the feet. Jesus used water at the Last Supper to wash the apostle's feet, feet weary and dirty from dusty, rocky roads. His action is a metaphor for and a model of service. He asked that we remember and emulate.

I have had the privilege of using water in ministry to baptise, cleanse, sooth and heal. Three incidents are etched in my memory

One was a toddler with curly hair and fat, brown, very dirty legs and feet. He had been playing outside, came in and went to sleep on the floor. He never woke up. He was rushed into emergency with meningitis and it was clear he was dying. As we

fought to save his little life, I kept looking at his dirty feet and desperately wanted to wash them. He died with dirty feet.

The second was a homeless woman who was brought into hospital following a cerebral haemorrhage. She was unresponsive, restless and uncomfortable. As I washed weeks, if not months, of dirt and cheap dye from her hair she appeared to quieten. I imagine she felt better. I know I did. She died peacefully.

The third was a baby, bruised and stained after a long labour and difficult birth. He was whimpering softly, too exhausted to cry. He desperately needed a wash. As I ran the warm water gently over his little head he actually sighed in relief, closed his eyes and went to sleep. He went home healthy.

On reflection, these ordinary, sacred memories hold the messages of Easter; death and new life, cleansing and healing; mystery and service.

Our observance of Easter will be different this year. Most of us will reflect and pray alone or in small groups. As we do so we recall the words and actions of Jesus. We are all called to 'wash feet', literally or metaphorically. We are called to reach out to others even as we are being bombarded with messages of personal and social isolation. We are reminded that the sacred is to be found in everyday actions. We are also reminded that sometimes we are called to allow others to wash our feet.

We may also take some time to reflect on the significance and symbolism of water as we participate in the Easter Triduum.

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