

The Ministry of Service
Holy Thursday – April 13, 2017
Church of the Holy Angels

1. Throughout the years, and hundreds of weddings, couples have made some very strange requests (fasten your seat belt Deacon Anthony)
 - “*Can we have our dog be the ring bearer?*” (*Only if HALO can be the presider!*)
 - “*Is it okay to have the flower girls and ring bearers be pulled down the aisle in wagons?*”
 - “*Can we get married at 1:30 p.m. instead of 2:00 p.m.? It’s bad luck to be married as the hands of the clock are falling down.*”
 - “*Can we do the sand ceremony at church?*” – “*Quicksand?*” I asked
 - “*Can the maid of honor be a man?*”
 - “*We have a Disney theme for the wedding. Can we do all Disney music for our venue?*”
 - The “venue?” Since when did we become a “venue?”

 - Then there were some more meaningful requests . . .
 - “*Can we get married during a weekend Mass? After all, this is about a promise we make to the Church and a promise the Church makes to us?*”
 - “*Instead of a unity candle, can we light tapers from the Paschal Candle and share Christ’s light with those present?*”
 - but one of the most interesting things I’ve heard of was a bride and groom who asked if they could wash each other’s feet during their wedding
 - and it happened to be Andy and Andrea Staron, son and daughter-in-law of Ray and Gina
 - Andy is a theologian and teacher at Wheeling Jesuit and his wife works for Catholic Charities in West Virginia and is doing amazing things

 - recently, I asked them to share with me what that ritual meant to them and why they chose to do the mandatum during their wedding mass and they wrote these words:
 - *Washing each other’s feet is not elegant. It’s more intimate than we’re usually comfortable being with others; it’s more trusting and vulnerable than we’d prefer to be. But despite this—and very likely because of it—Jesus offers us a clear message: to be with him means to be willing to wash and be washed, to serve and be served, to give and to receive. Whatever else marriage may be, it is a school of discipleship where we learn to love and learn that we are loved. Marriage invites us into the trust and vulnerability where we begin to understand—to experience in the love incarnated in our spouse—what Jesus does for us.*

 - an invitation to trust and vulnerability; to wash and be washed, serve and be served, give and receive
 - love incarnated
2. The ritual we are about to perform tonight was not unfamiliar to Jesus nor to the disciples
 - a host made certain that a guest felt welcomed; and part of that welcome was to have your feet washed with warm water as you entered someone’s home
 - the ritual, however, was never performed by the host, only by the servant

- so the clear message Jesus sends to us today is that, even those in authority, must be willing to serve, must be willing to trust and be vulnerable, to give and to receive, to wash and be washed
 - this was a stunning reversal from what they had known
 - no doubt why Peter hesitates and can't fathom how this could be possible
 - Jesus even washes the feet of his betrayer, Judas Iscariot, and, in doing so, shows the tremendous power of forgiveness and mercy
 - it was an action taught in the school of discipleship – meant as an everlasting reminder of servant leadership
3. When you think about it – it's really an awkward thing – washing of feet
- just picture a bride in her wedding dress, a groom in his tux removing socks and shoes, stripped of the trappings, the formality, the decorum of the event
 - to stoop low on an exultant day – a day that everyone is watching every movement, every touch, every kiss
 - focusing on one of the most embarrassing parts of our anatomy – imperfect, misshapen, sensitive, and not particularly flattering feet
 - however, it reminds us of our own human flesh – frail, vulnerable, clumsy, uncomfortable
- yes, it's a bit awkward
 - but sometimes the most awkward and uncomfortable moments in our lives reveal to us something of God and the way God uses power and the way God uses love
 - like the comfort of a friend after a loved one dies
 - the healing power of a hug or an embrace when bad news strikes
 - the assurance of prayers, the support of a parish family, the beauty of music to reach us in our brokenness, our vulnerability, our deepest fears
 - God doesn't use power to control, God uses power to release the power of our humanity and our divinity – to be love incarnated – for others
4. And if the footwashing doesn't do it, then there are good people who give witness to it
- In 2010 Nelson Mandela had a gathering to celebrate his 20th anniversary of release from prison – he was incarcerated for 26 years!
 - he invited one of his former jailers, Christo Brand, to the gathering
 - speaking about the relationship which developed between the two men, Mandela said, “it reinforced my belief in the essential humanity of even those who had kept me behind bars”
 - or Elyse Loveman one of our Edge kids who went to St. Malachi's to bring blessing bags to the homeless who are sheltered there overnight
 - in her conversation with one of the men, he said that what he wanted most was a bible
 - without hesitation, she went back to the bus, got her bible and gifted it to him
 - and Keegan Sheehan, who went first out to the bus to get his gloves and hat and gave them away without hesitation to one of the men
 - or any one of our parishioners who have canvassed hotels and motels throughout northeast Ohio raising awareness of human trafficking and providing materials to help kids escape their captors

5. What many people don't know about marriage is that it's actually a sacrament of service
 - and, tonight, members of our Couple Ministry will be reminded of that as their feet are washed and then as they wash the feet of those gathered here tonight
 - no matter who we are or what our vocation in life is, we are all called to be sacramental, called to be incarnational
 - to reveal to the world a God who is not afraid to stoop low, to bend down, to meet us where we are and to take upon himself, the role of servant
 - Sandra Schneiders, theologian and author, says that the foot washing in John's Gospel is a call to mutuality, shared service and shared power
 - it is not about master and slave – but it is about all of us and the power each of us has been given by God to change the world

6. Picking up the towel and washing feet
 - coming alongside to release power in others
 - what we do has tremendous power – at work, at home, among our colleagues and friends
 - in hundreds of ways, great and small, we the Church do what we do to offer the world a new pattern of leadership
 - a call which is awkward to pursue – there is nothing glamorous about it
 - often counter-cultural, nothing to profit from
 - except gaining the enormous gift of learning how to give ourselves away in love

7. Jesus says, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”