

ACF Maundy Thursday Service

Homily

April 14, 2022

John 13

1. The Work is Finished, The End is Written. But there is beyond

I was rather surprised to get a WhatsApp message from my dear teacher Dr. Abraham Joseph on Tuesday the 5th of April. It was a song by the Grammy Winner Maryanne J George and Dr. Joseph wrote that it made a lot of sense to him and would be helpful in preparation for my Easter message since it spoke of the breathing again.

A couple of days later on the 9th of April I woke up to hear the shocking news of the demise of Prof. Abraham Joseph.

I read through his message and the lyrics of Living Hope yet again

How great the chasm that lay between us

How high the mountain I could not climb

In desperation, I turned to heaven

And spoke your name into the night

Then through the darkness

Your loving kindness

Tore through the shadows of my soul

The work is finished, the end is written

Jesus Christ, my living hope

It is this imagery that comes to my mind as I read the scene of the Washing of the Feet and the Last Supper again. John 13: reads Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

What a consoling understanding of death and dying

Knowing that your hour is come

Knowing that it is only a departure from this world

Knowing that you are going to your father

Imagine the context again. Jesus knew he will not have another weekend, perhaps another day. He knew his hour had come. John's narrative of the signs began with Jesus telling his mother that his hour has not yet come.

And 'the hour' remains a consistent theme. In the conversation with the Samaritan woman he reminds twice that the hour is coming where worship will happen in truth and spirit. In Chapter 5 he tells the Jews that the hour is coming and in Chapter 7 he reminds them My Time has not yet come. But in 12:23 when Philip tells him that some Greeks want to see him Jesus says- The hour is come for the son of Man to be glorified. In 12:27 after the inner struggle Jesus affirms- It is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

In the Last supper discourse the hour is a consistent theme used seven times and the conclusion in 17:1 is Father the Hour is Come; glorify your son so that the son may glorify you. The Hour is far beyond the sixty minutes. It is about understanding the purpose of your life rather than the duration of your life.

Another word that has always excited me is the word departure. That explains death much better than Thanatos or nekrosis that sounds definitive and end-like. But departure is a beautiful image of a journey. Like a person coming to Freiburg, completing the mission and departing to the next destination. Light though it may sound its profundity is deeper than we can comprehend. Jesus Departed.

Having a Destination makes any departure meaningful. Jesus was going to his father. Where is it? How would that place look like? Its like me trying to explain how Freiburg looked like to my friends from the google images I have seen and narratives that friends told me before coming here. But now being here I can tell them a new story. We still do not have that definitive story but we understand that it is a destination many have prepared and enjoyed going to. The joy is also in the journey as is in the excitement of the destination.

The Work is Finished. The End is Written but there is the beyond.

2. Love is a Distinctive Mark of Discipleship

The Lovemeter- an instrument to measure Love! Have you ever imagined such a machine. Imagine if it kept reading for you the level of love to ensure that the love level does not drop beyond permissible level. That would surely be an interesting idea to ponder

John 13 tells us of one of the unique characteristics of Jesus and it is that his love never ends

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. What does it mean loving to the end.

Loving despite betrayal, denial, desertion

Loving despite the fact that love is not experienced mutually

Loving despite the pain and pathos
Loving expecting nothing in return
Platonic though it may seem there is surely excitement in it.

We had a poignant Wednesday diocesan service yesterday. Bishop Robert Innes reminded us of the two Caritas Volunteers who were killed in Russian attack at Mariopole. The global family horrified and shocked. Peace must be given a chance- Caritas pleads. We still continue the engagement in humanitarian assistance reflecting the love of God, they said.

Christina Lukaschenko the church warden of Kiev who now is in refuge spoke of the ground realities in areas where the people who seek to return to their towns discovering the horrific war crimes including the land mines that was planted. When will we learn? One of the horrific images that still linger in my mind is that of a three legged elephant which lost one in a mine blast. Have you ever imagined walking in an area with the warning- be careful of landmines?

Malcom Rogers the Chaplain of Moscow reminded us that the Government tries to paint a picture that nothing has changed but in fact everything is changed. The narrative that is constructed justifying war is gruesome. He had to travel home for his fathers death last week. He told us What was just a four hour travel is today a 12 hour expedition.

The Kiev Treasurer Tamara read from Lamentations 1: 1, 10-13. Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow!!!

In this context of conflict and war- what is Love. Love that never ends!!! We must also read the new commandment that Jesus gives around the washing of the feet.

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Yes Love is a distinctive mark of discipleship.

Lets switch our love meter apps on and see where we stand!!

If we fall short of the requirements the only medicine is LOVE

3. The Insider Is More a Challenge than the Outsider

Have your thought about this. The Challenge is Mostly from the Inside and not always from Outside. The Jesus movement had to be bridled and the Evil One sought ways of how to do that. Seeking for a volunteer to trigger the downfall the Evil One looked within the fold. "The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him". And during supper Jesus did make this clear- not all who are here are clean. The Synoptics go a bit more clearer with Jesus saying- One of you will betray me and Judas asking the question- Is it I Lord? Surely not I, am I?

One Among the Twelve. Without making any value judgements I would say that the greatest challenge the Christ movement faces today is not from outside but from the inside. It is not the neighbour who is affecting the witness of the church- it is the insider.

Arnold Toynbee reflecting on the Clash of Civilisations and studying history reminds the downfall of all civilisations was basically due to internal disintegration rather than external aggression. The external aggressor helps you to hold together and therefore the most successful war strategy was always internal disintegration and triggering conflict. The Divide and Conquer. Civilisations are never murdered, they commit suicide by disintegrating.

Jesus plainly said- Not all of you are clean? We could have two responses. Is it I Lord? And do nothing about it?

Rather the easier way is- Could be him. A surely its her.

Friends, the phrase one among the twelve should be carefully looked at on this night of the Maundy Thursday. It is on this night that the one among the twelve traded his master for thirty pieces of silver. It is on this night the loftiest symbol of affection- the kiss- was used as a mark of betrayal.

When the synoptics narrate the account of Judas going to the Chief Priest for the trade of all the synoptics calls him with this phrase- One Among the Twelve. (Matt 26:14; Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3). John in the text we read also talks of one among you is a devil but he had already made it explicit in

John 6:70-71 where Jesus says one of you is a devil and he was mentioning about one of the twelve.

One is enough!!! Is it I Lord?

4. The Call is to Wash One Another's Feet.

If Sacraments were what Jesus asked his disciples to do then one of the most meaningful sacraments should be the washing of the feet

In John 13 we read ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Washing of the feet is a teaching of the Lord

Washing of the feet is an example shown by the Lord

Washing of the feet is the commandment of the Lord

Washing of the feet is the expression of humility and service

Washing of the feet is an expression of blessedness

I started with the image of a chasm- a deep divide. In context where there were deep divides between people be it in the name of colour, class, caste, gender, orientation, ethnicity untouchability was a norm. Washing of the feet was a revolution that built bridges among estranged communities.

The Master washing the disciples feet was a paradigm shift. It was turning the pyramid of power dynamics and normal expectations upside down.

Andrea Kevington visualises the picture of Jesus washing the feet of Jesus she writes (<https://andreaskevington.com/2019/04/09/poem-jesus-washes-judas-feet/>)

Jesus washes Judas' feet.

That moment, when you knelt before him,
took off his sandals, readied the water,
did you look up? Search his eyes?
Find in them some love, some trace
of all that had passed between you?

As you washed his feet, holding them in your hand,
watching the cool water soak away the dirt,
feeling bones through hard skin,
you knew he would leave the lit room,
and slip out into the dark night.

And yet, with these small daily things –
with washing, with breaking and sharing bread,
you reached out your hand, touched, fed.
Look, the kingdom is like this:

as small as a mustard seed, as yeast,
a box of treasure hidden away beneath the dirt.
See how such things become charged,
mighty, when so full of love. This is the way.

In that moment, when silence ebbed between you,
and you wrapped a towel around your waist;
when you knew, and he knew, what would be,
you knelt before him, even so, and took off
his sandals, and gently washed his feet.

Let Us Wash Each Others Feet
Let Us Join in the Breaking of the Bread

Vinod Victor
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