

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK, APRIL 8

We continue to read John's gospel for Wednesday in Holy Week. As I write this, Passover begins for our Jewish sisters and brothers. Chag Pesach Sameach.

Our reading is the foot-washing scene in John, chapter 13. The scene is crammed with drama: the declaration to Judas that Jesus knows the betrayal is coming, the foot-washing, the well-meant but un-achievable promise of Peter to be faithful, the giving of a new commandment.

My focal point is what Jesus is doing—which no one else really understands. Jesus is accepting, into his very core, the reality of his "life's work". It isn't the preaching, the healing, the arguing with religious authorities, it is showing a rag-tag bunch of selfish, block-headed, uncomprehending, irresolute people from the back of beyond—along with a traitor in the ranks—what he knows they can't even begin to understand: that he loves them as they are—Judas included--and this is what his life's work has ultimately been about, creating a new community.

What they don't know, but will learn in the hardest school of life there is, is that they are failures at the disciple business. All of them. They have no place to hide from either God or themselves. We know that's what's coming. Jesus knows it too, and still he goes through the foot-washing and all the rest. Why?

I think at least part of the answer is that Jesus wants them to see that imitating him, in love and sacrifice, is the only thing that ever really convinces others about who God is. But people have to see it for themselves, experience the reality of receiving what they need but can neither earn nor deserve. They have to accept a gift.

So, I further think that people in our day and time are only going to care about what the church offers by experiencing the care that the church (that's us) knows we have been offered by God first.

As St. Paul put it, "It is not ourselves that we proclaim, but Jesus Christ as Lord".