



**“Those who do what is true come to the light”
(Jn 3:21)**

Reflections for Lent from the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN)

Those who do what is true come to the light

Our reflection for Maundy Thursday is written by Fr Alex Muyebe SJ, who runs the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi.

“If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.”

Ex 12:4

“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Jn 13:14-15

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday is about celebrating the Sacrament of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Life. Understood in the light of the washing of feet, the Eucharist is a place of restoration for people on the way. Jesus has given us the Eucharist as a place where we can go to bathe our aching feet and to be refreshed in body and soul for the journey that lies ahead.

But having our feet washed and washing the feet of others are two sides of the coin we call Christian life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” First the Lord washes us clean so that we belong to the Lord. Only then are we qualified and empowered to wash the feet of our sisters and brothers. Jesus says to the disciples, “For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you.” Here Jesus is missioning us to wash the feet of others in our daily lives.

We live in a world where people are preoccupied with washing their own feet first. We are busy with our own needs as we struggle to make it in life. Often our needs come first before other people's needs. We live in a "me-first" world.

By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus is challenging us to pay attention to other people's needs first. Jesus is teaching us that life is about being at the service of others, especially those among us who are marginalised such as people living with HIV, orphans, vulnerable children and women and people living in abject poverty. Unfortunately, this spirit of service and paying attention to other people's needs, which Jesus is teaching us, is in not all that common in many countries.

For instance, I live and work in one of the poorest countries in the world, Malawi. Over 65% of Malawians cannot afford a dollar a day. Poverty stares you in the face wherever you go. Yet the paradox is that a few individual government officials and their cronies live in luxurious mansions and drive big cars, thanks to the money they steal from government coffers.

It is common practice that those who are charged with responsibility to run this country, on behalf of the people, shamelessly help themselves to the lion's share of the meagre government resources while social services collapse under their watch. For instance, hospitals register many preventable deaths because of a shortage of drugs and other supplies and equipment in medical facilities. People on antiretroviral drugs are severely affected because resources are not used for the common good but for the good of the privileged few.

Jesus' example of service challenges us to eliminate these structures of social injustice and selfishness. He is challenging us to rid our society of this "me-first" culture and to have the interest of the common good at heart. By shedding His blood on the cross, Jesus is making a new covenant with us (Matthew 26:28), and our prayer is that we allow ourselves to be renewed and transformed by this manifestation of the greatest love.

In this new covenant, Jesus promises us eternal life. May we have the grace to accept to be a

new covenant people, a people preoccupied with the service of others, a people who live for others and who put others' needs first. May we be a people committed to transforming structures of injustice and selfishness into structures of love and service, especially by being sensitive to the needs of the less privileged people in our society.