

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

John 13:16–17



On Maundy Thursday, we see Jesus using every part of his body to convey a single message: he and his followers have come to serve. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus states, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you as an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14–15).

Since Jesus mentions his role as a teacher, I want to reflect on his teaching methods. Jesus frequently conveys his messages at a slant. He teaches in parables, and Christians have been puzzling over their meanings for centuries. Jesus uses intentionally obscure gestures. For instance, when he faces a tough line of questioning, Jesus raises a coin and proclaims, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

In contrast, during the Last Supper, Jesus throws his full body weight to convey one clear message. He uses every tool at his disposal—dramatic, symbolic action and words—to emphasize his message that those who follow him are there to serve, not to be served. He desperately doesn't want his future followers to get this part wrong.

And yet we do. It is mildly funny to see how Peter immediately misunderstands what Jesus was trying to convey. Peter first refuses to have his feet washed and then he goes to the other extreme and asks Jesus to wash every part of him.

Today's readings

Psalms 116:1,10–17 | Exodus 12:1–4,(5–10), 11–14 | 1 Corinthians 11:23–26
John 13:1–17,31b–35

To what extent have we received Jesus' message about service? Do we really see our ministry as one of service or are we trapped in the role of waiting to be served?