

One of the hazards of being a priest is that sometimes I act as though I should be served rather than serve. As a young priest, before I became a pastor I noticed that many other pastors had people shop, cook, do the laundry and clean house for them. Many of those priests were generous in serving others on the job, but at home they lived like princes. On the day I first became a pastor, the rectory cook resigned. At the age of 36, I had never had to prepare my own meals. I decided it might be a good time to learn. I also decided to clean my own house and do my own laundry. After a few years of that, I learned that cleaning was not a skill I possessed. So, we hired someone to clean the rectory, but to this day I still shop for my own food, cook it at home, wash my own clothes and iron my own shirts. Still, you people are very good to me, and I have to be careful in my work that I do not take advantage of you. Sometimes I fail.

If I knew that my next supper would be my last, and that I had a chance to share it with some family, friends and coworkers, I think I would let myself be the guest of honor. I'd let someone else cook, set the table, serve the meal, and clean up. I would probably let others serve me rather than have me serve them.

Jesus didn't do it that way. Jesus decided to help out at the meal. He washed the feet of his disciples. At the last supper of his life, he decided not to become the guest of honor, but to do his job. John says, "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end." So here is Jesus, loving his disciples, loving them to the end of his life, loving them to the end of the extent that you can love someone, and loving them to the end and purpose of his life: He came to serve, not to be served.

Many of you give a good example of this kind of loving. Parents and children help one another out of love. You volunteer here at church without expecting payment. You lift one another's spirits, and you rejoice because of your blessings. You help without counting the cost.

At the last supper, Jesus didn't have to do anything. He could have let the disciples wash his feet, but he wanted to give them something before he died. He didn't wrap a present. He didn't give them spending money to buy something for themselves as a memento. He didn't do something he was uniquely skilled at – he didn't give them a hand-made pottery bowl or a personally carved olive-wood camel. He did something you don't need skill to do. He did something anyone could do, something that slaves did. He washed feet.

This is good to remember especially when we are with the people we love the most. Are we there to be served or to serve? Are we there to eat the meal or help prepare it? Are we there to pour coffee or have someone fill our cup? Are we there to pick up trash and hold open a door – or is that for someone else to do? The people we love need our service the most, and they are often the ones we take advantage of the most. When we serve others by doing something anybody else could do, we do what Jesus did.