

The Lord be with you. (And also with you.)
Please be seated.

I asked Joe Clark for permission to read the Gospel tonight and he consented. I would like to proclaim the Gospel and deliver the homily at the same time. The Gospel story is a familiar text of the events at the Last Supper; I have imagined a dialogue which could have taken place at the meal and have inserted it into the Gospel. So, let me tell you a story based on the holy gospel according to St. John.

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus realized that the hour had come for him to pass over from this world to the Father. The Father possessed Jesus, and induced him to love his own in this world. But the devil possessed Judas, and induced him to hand Jesus over. Still, Jesus showed his love to the end.

While they were at supper, Jesus asked the Twelve, "What is service?" Immediately they became uncomfortable. They knew from experience that whoever spoke first was bound to have the wrong answer. That is, they all knew that except Peter, who spoke first. "Lord, I know what service is, for I have seen it in my family." Jesus could hardly believe his ears. Would Peter finally speak the truth? "In my family," Peter continued, "my good wife sets me free so I can spend all my time with you. And when I visit home, her mother waits on me constantly. That, Lord, is service." "No," said Jesus, "that is not service, that is slavery."

"Teacher, I know what service is." It was Matthew who spoke. "Service is paying taxes so that the whole community may live in harmony." Matthew was a democrat. "No," said Jesus, "that is not service, that is obligation."

"Lord, I know what service is." All eyes turned to Judas, who held the money bag. "Service is not paying a tax, it is giving freely to the poor, so that they benefit from our wealth." "No," said Jesus, "that is not service, that is generosity."

Jesus continued. "If you owe to someone, you cannot serve. If you are superior to someone, you cannot serve. Service is love. Service is among equals."

Then, fully aware that he had come from God and was going to God, the Father who had handed everything over to him, Jesus rose from the meal and took off his cloak. He picked up a towel and tied it around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with the towel he had around him.

Thus, he came to Peter, who protested, "Lord, what are you doing? You are not my servant. You shall never wash my feet." "Peter, you are not my master, you are my equal. If I do not wash you, you will have no share in my heritage." "Lord," Simon Peter wept for joy, "then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus told him, "Those who have bathed have no need to wash except for their feet; they are entirely cleansed, just as you are; though not all." (The reason he said, "Not all" are washed clean, was that he knew his betrayer.)

After he had washed their feet, he put his cloak back on and reclined at table once more. He said to them: "Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet--I who am Teacher and Lord--then you must wash each other's feet. Not in slavery, not in obligation, not even in generosity, but only in love. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do."

This is the Gospel of the Lord. (Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.)
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