

A Worship Minute.....

-by Mary C. Earle

Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. —

John 13:5

The Thursday of Holy Week is known as "Maundy Thursday," referring to the Latin word for commandment, *mandatum*. As we saw yesterday, in these last days of his life, Jesus both states and enacts his new commandment—that we love one another as he has loved us. To show the disciples what he means, he washes their feet. These feet would have been dusty, cracked, lined. A servant would normally have taken a basin and washed the feet of guests arriving for a meal.

Jesus, whom the disciples know as teacher and friend, healer and leader, abandons all of those roles and kneels before each disciple, washing feet. It is scandalous. Peter, for one, cannot bear it. He says to Jesus, "You will never wash my feet." (John 13:9) Jesus leads him to see that this washing of one another is a way revealing divine tenderness in common, human need. All of us need to have our feet washed. All of us need to wash another.

On this night in which he is betrayed by Judas, Jesus also has a last meal with his disciples. He shares bread and wine with them, saying "Do this in remembrance of me." A washing and a meal—both shared in common, both offered by Jesus as signs of the love that will not let us go, of the divine life embodied in him.

There is a kind of familial, maternal care in these last actions—washing, feeding, teaching. Jesus knows that his time is short, and so he desires to give the disciples the essence of his life and his work: Love one another. Wash one another's feet. Feed one another. In those actions you will discover the very life of God, dwelling there with you, waiting to be discovered and celebrated. You will discover, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta often said, Jesus the Christ in "his many different disguises."