

Holy Thursday Reflection

Kim Takacs

My name is Kim Takacs and I've been a parishioner here at St. Joseph for the last four years. My husband, Axel, and I and our two kids, ages 2 and 5, are regulars at the 9:00 am Sunday mass- you may have seen us in the back of the church- either camped out next to the toy box or chasing down our two-year-old in the back.

I'm excited to have the opportunity to share a reflection with you today on Holy Thursday because the washing of the feet has always been a very meaningful story and message to me. In fact, it holds such meaning to me that my husband and I chose to have a washing of the feet ceremony at our wedding mass 9 years ago this June. After saying our vows, we washed each other's feet and then together we washed the feet of our parents and a few friends. While this is not a typical reading or ceremony for a wedding, we felt strongly that in marriage we were committing not just to serving each other but also to turn outward and serve others together as a couple.

So while Jesus's Holy Thursday message of service and solidarity has always resonated with me, I didn't yet understand 9 years ago how it's meaning would shift and deepen in subsequent chapters and seasons of my life.

In the washing of the feet gospel, we see Jesus humble himself and tenderly, compassionately wash the feet of his disciples. It strikes me that he does this the day before he dies for us on the cross. He's about to give the ultimate sacrifice, he knows he is going to die for the people seated at the table, he can perform literal miracles. But still, he models for us humility and service, not through gifts or extravagant showing of his love, but through the simple, mundane, less-than-glamorous washing of the feet.

As a mom to two young children, the day-to-day life of child-raising-- with diaper changing, meal prep, hours of pretend play and cleaning up-- while truly one of the greatest joys of my life-- can at times feel isolating and overwhelming. We live in a society that devalues caregiving work, work that is disproportionately done by women, especially women of color, both in the home and professionally. It's easy to feel that this work doesn't matter. There are days where I feel like I got nothing done but just keep these children alive. With endless winter colds and flu, I feel like some days the most I can do is wipe noses and comfort cranky kids, often feeling sick myself. It's not always glamorous.

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But Jesus's model on Holy Thursday reminds me that service and compassion does not *just* look like big shows of sacrifice and service. It can and should look like meeting another person wherever they are in that moment, dirty feet and all, runny nose and all. Instead of viewing the day-to-day as monotonous and therefore unimportant, I am called to shift my perspective to one of compassionate service. *Service can* look like extending empathy to my 5 year old when his brother has ruined his block tower for the hundredth time, instead of snapping in frustration. *Service can* look like giving myself grace when I am a less than perfect parent instead of judging myself. It can look like how my husband chooses to get up with the kids every morning so I can sleep in that extra half hour. It can look like Fr. Jim buying toys to have at the back of the church so young families like us feel like they belong. Holy Thursday reminds me to look at my day-to-day life with a spirit of service and to re-frame the hard, the messy, the monotonous as compassionate service. Jesus modeled this service for us in the washing of the feet but he also reminded us that we are not alone in these day to day tasks. Jesus is there in the messy with us.

And in humbling himself, Jesus reminds us that service is also in the sometimes messy, internal self-examination that must come at the individual level in order for there to be greater social change. For my job, I have the privilege of leading a nonprofit that works on disability justice and inclusion initiatives in the community. I love my work and it's easy for me to focus on and find fulfillment in the *public* facing events and workshops. But Holy Thursday reminds me that service must also be behind the scenes, in the challenging learning and unlearning that I must do to examine the ways that my life contributes to systems and structures that marginalize others. Service also means going out of my comfort zone to examine my own privilege; it's listening to people with lived experiences; it's sitting in the discomfort instead of running from it, so that I can grow. Jesus is there, in the messy with us.

So this Holy Thursday, I pray that Jesus' message of compassion, solidarity, and service penetrate the beautiful monotony of our daily lives. That we continue to look for ways to serve our families and communities in the less-than-glamorous moments of our lives and by growing our understanding of others to expand the reach of our compassion. And that we may feel Jesus with us in the messiness.