

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let the Lord wash your feet.

When the 'lockdown' came in with sudden effect, I felt completely unable to get a grip and work out some effective strategy for the new situation I found myself working in. A few funeral visits. A few small gatherings by the graveside and at the crematorium came and went. Then it crept up on me unseen.

First a pain right up my back, so that I couldn't sleep. Then the next day the pain went right up my front and stayed. My head felt as though clamped in a vice. My nose was blocked and all my muscles went weak. My taste buds were shot and my mouth tasted like a toxic waste dump. I was forced to self-diagnose the Coronavirus.

Days and nights passed with little change. Things eased and I slept continually. Then one evening I began to cough and I could feel my lungs were not good. For the first time I thought that I might not get through this.

And here I was pathetic and useless as Holy Week began. I wasn't even praying properly! Getting to Maundy Thursday evening, sadly I 'live streamed' the Mass of the Last Supper celebrated by Pope Francis from St Peter's in Rome. He quietly delivered his homily without any script, straight from the heart into the vast emptiness of the basilica. All I remember were his quietly firm word. "Let the Lord wash your feet", repeated three times.

These words enter me at a deep level, expressing the inexpressible. They are with me when I lie down and they are with me when I wake up.

It is good to work for God and even better to do God's work. But there are times when God must be allowed to work *for us and within us* – if we are to be transformed.

Let the Lord wash your feet.

This is the 'letting go and letting God'. This is the struggle after many years of kneeling before God, to now let God (in Jesus) kneel before *you* and wash *your* feet. This useless pray-er is being drawn into still, loving attentiveness before the Lord. Easy – but difficult too, because of that guilty sense (fostered by the devil) that I should be *doing* something – that my 'idleness' may be an insult to God. This is the point to peacefully cooperate as the Lord works within. The experience of being useless is not a sign of failure, but of growth. The dark dryness is evidence that God is not absent but present in a deeper way. We have not lost our way even though we cannot see the Way. This is the faith of Holy Week that opens up in us the Risen life of Easter.

What an abyss confronts Mary Magdelene, as she loses the one she loves above all else, on the Cross. The feet that she had so lovingly knelt to wipe clean with her hair, now scarred by the nails of death.

What unexpected joy in the garden of her encounter with Him whom she recognises first not by sight, but by his calling of her name in the quiet dawn of her longing.

His Risen life fills her- consumes her, as she runs to tell her brothers.

p.s I think I have more or less recovered, but I will now go “under the radar” for a week or two to get my physical strength back. The funeral directors have my mobile number if they need me.

A book to read is “Drinking from a dry well” by Thomas H Green S.J

I am grateful to Mgr John Broadhurst who kept the Mass going when I could not do so.

I am grateful to you all just for being there with me.

Fr Paul