

*Do you know what I have done for you?*

In the name of the Father...

I want just to say a few brief words about the remarkable way St John has chosen to introduce the story of the foot-washing in his gospel, and what it has to tell us about what is going on, not just in today's gospel, but over the course of all these holy days.

“And during supper” St John tells us, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe[...]and began to wash the disciples' feet”.

So easily do the words of this little preamble to St John's account of the foot-washing trip off our tongues that its easy for us to forget what an extraordinary way this is to introduce an event which, to St John's original audience, would have been about as mundane an occurrence as somebody blowing their nose. “Jesus”, we are told, “*knowing[...]that he had come from God and was going to God*” took off his outer robe and began to wash his disciples' feet. The backdrop, in other words, against which St John would have us view the story of the foot-washing is the entire divine mission of the Son of God to earth for the salvation of the world. What St John would have us bear in mind as we witness the spectacle of the foot-washing is that the one who is about to bend down and wash his disciples' feet is the eternal Word of God who was with the Father in the beginning, who has taken flesh for our salvation and who is returning to his Father.

But that is not all St John has to tell us. “Jesus” he says “*knowing that the Father had given all things into his hand* and that he had come from God and was going to God” got down and washed his disciples' feet. In other words, when the Son of God, who has come to earth for our salvation, returns to the Father from whom he has come, he will not be returning to him empty-handed. The Father has put all things into the hands of Jesus *in order that* when he returns to God he might carry with him the entire

created order, bringing us and the whole of creation to share in that unity with God which he has shared with his Father from before the world began.

That is what St John would have us remember is going on while Jesus is scrubbing at his disciples' toes. To say then that St John's intention is to widen our perspective on what we are looking at seems like something of an understatement.

Why, then? Why does St John want us to remember this just at this moment? I suspect it is because, as with our own celebrations, the washing of the disciples's feet marks the moment when the darkness begins to gather over Jesus and his disciples. Having told us in the very same preamble that "Satan had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray [Jesus]" St John tells us that immediately after the foot-washing Judas went out to carry out his intention and so set off the chain of events that will lead inexorably to the Cross.

And what will we do? At the end of this service, as Jesus is arrested and taken away to be judged and condemned, we and the whole Church enter into a kind of suspended animation, the altars will be stripped, the lights put out, and we will not see that light again until the great light of the Resurrection dawns upon us.

What St John is attempting to remind us, then, is that this moment, though dark and full of foreboding, belongs to a narrative that is infinitely greater and more astonishing than anything we can possibly imagine: the great and majestic symphony the Fathers knew as the economy of salvation. And to be part of this extraordinary movement of God is the most sublimely wonderful thing that will ever happen to humanity, from the moment Adam first opened his eyes to the blowing of the last trumpet.

So then, just a little reminder...

Amen.