



*Do you understand what I have done for you? John 13:12*

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We are going through the motions and the EMOTIONS of Holy Week as I begin this reflection. The above question struck me as I pondered the scripture during prayer and then came another: ***Do you, Ann, understand what I have done for you?*** ringing throughout my entire being. It caused a deep silence to follow, and the shaky, raw words fell whispering into that deep cavern of silence... "I don't think I do fully understand?"

This began a process of pondering what God really has done for me. Yes, the big things are easy to find. What about all those little daily opportunities that often go unnoticed. The finding of something that was 'lost'; the ability to get through a task with ease and experience fulfilment; walking through a day without too much hassle; a dispute resolved without confrontation; a simple smile from a passer-by that lifts the heart; the sun dancing and shimmering across the backyard bringing joy to the spirit; and many other things that touch us and we fail to notice it taking place, or don't remember, or are not conscious of it even happening.

We live in a world that is drowning in distractions, and it is so easy to be pulled into any number of them almost at the same time. From this space fear raises its head and tells us that we are not in control and something bad might happen or we will not be able to deal



with the consequences. A wonderful example happened for me several years ago while facilitating a Holy Week Retreat. I had planned a "washing of the feet" session in which the feet of several characters of the passion narrative – Pilate, the Cross maker, the Soldier who mocked Jesus and Simon who helped Jesus carry the cross would be enacted. (Did I really need to deal with four characters?). The dialogue for each was carefully planned and memorised to heighten the brutal reality and truth of what took place. All went well until I knelt in front of the first person when the memorised dialogue slipped silently away

and left my mind totally blank and I froze. For several moments the fear was real, kept me motionless, unable to utter a word. I then looked into the eyes of the intended “victim”, leaned into the heart of God and opened my mouth. Whatever happened after that I can’t recall. However, while walking around the green space outside afterwards with those present, I was met with tearful eyes and hearts that had been affected in a way that my planned and memorised dialogue would never have touched in a million years! I had learned to let go of my ego and turn to Almighty God, (at that moment anyway!). I too had experienced the grace of God’s deep personal love for each of us. A deep place of truth within each of us, including the ‘observers’ was awakened during those moments. That lesson has stayed with me and often comes to mind when fear begins to set in for me. The question still remains:

*‘Are you prepared to take up the towel and grab a bowl and wash the feet of those in your daily life?’*

And the response, simple as it may seem today, is that I truly don’t believe that the disciples – along with you and me – even have the foggiest idea of what Jesus has TRULY done for us. Judging by our actions and values we are still struggling to come to terms with what all this really means for us. John 13:7<sup>1</sup> is a reminder that we may not understand at this moment, but there will be a time later when we will. I guess the question is: how much later?

What are we looking for but power and control? Yet Jesus is still saying to us “Here is the basin and the towel, go and wash your neighbour’s feet.” I guess if we are truly honest with God – and ourselves - we **do not get** what Jesus means when he says he has set an example for us and that we ought do as he has done for us (see John 13: 15). He goes on to say:

*<sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13: 16-17*

Do we understand? Sadly, I think not. All the while the disciples are arguing with each other about who is the most important. Does it sound familiar? We want hierarchy, authority, to be the one who stands out from all the others. Yet Jesus says, “Here’s the towel, here’s the basin. Go wash each other’s feet.” We can almost see in 3D the looks on the faces, the noses screwed up and even taste the smelly feet! So, what do we do but start exploring leadership and control, replacing servant leadership with courses and degrees on Christian leadership where we gain control over each other; thereby replacing love with power. Henri Nouwen makes a startling point when he says: *“The long painful history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby give us hope are the true saints.”*<sup>2</sup> Will we humans ever learn from our forebears? Reading Richard Rohr I find myself invited into the way God deals with the prophets and find *“Jesus is forever purifying his messengers by pulling them outside of the usual reward systems”*<sup>3</sup> and calling them into a way to *“live on the edge of the inside without totally exiting the fold.”*<sup>4</sup> Strangely, I find this comforting, and maybe this is where I want to feel at home when God asks me “do you understand?” If I am truthful, the answer is still, ‘No I don’t really understand but this place feels weirdly better.’

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<sup>1</sup> ‘You don’t realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ — John 13:7

<sup>2</sup> © 1990 Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London p 60

<sup>3</sup> © 2025 Richard Rohr, *The Tears of Things*, Convergent New York, p 53

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 54.

## ***Falling out of God***

The infinite Divine Creativity of God has forever been drawing goodness, beauty and richness from our stumbling, stupidity, failings and brokenness. Again, we fail to see this and recognise the working of the Divine in our daily life. Pope Leo in his homily for Easter Sunday said:

*Through the cracks of resurrection that open up in the darkness, Jesus entrusts our hearts to the hope that sustains us: the power of death is not the final destiny of our lives. We are all directed, once and for all, on the path to fulfilment, because in Christ we also have risen.*<sup>5</sup>

If only I – and we – could truly see. What a difference it would make to our world, for us to really begin to notice; to truly believe that Our God walks with us at all times. Again, as Pope Leo noted in his Easter Sunday homily: *We need this song of hope today. It is ourselves, risen with Christ, who must bring him into the streets of the world.*

Could it be that a lot of us in our world today are feeling homeless! Nouwen makes the point that the word ‘homeless’ “reveals one of our deepest and most painful conditions, the condition of not having a sense of belonging, of not having a place where we can feel safe, cared for, protected, and loved.”<sup>6</sup> Could it be that we have allowed ourselves to lose the sense of who it is to **whom we belong?** Has our sense of belonging slipped away from our consciousness and pulled us into a space that fails to alert us to a sense of our hidden call as unique human beings, gifted with something no one else has, to become concrete in our place and time. Will we be forever observers in our own lives, not noticing the **ever present, presence of our God.** It seems we waste a lot of time searching for what is not important while not claiming our belovedness.<sup>7</sup> We need to continually look beyond the surface of what the world is telling us in order to reshape, dismantle, pull apart, the destructive worldly mechanisms in order to dive into that deeper part of us that knows we are more than what we do, or who the world tells us we are. Each of us truly is a child of God, beloved in the eyes of God, and held in love forever. We do, all of us, have times when we endeavour to freely give ourselves over to being mindful of the beloved-ness of our world and spend time reflecting the goodness, beauty, richness and wonder of our existence, while recalling that God only requires our remembering that our home is within God. By taking seriously our CEN function and purpose, we intentionally set aside time daily, allowing our awareness to be heightened and action to be carried forth in a variety of creative ways of holding lovingly and washing the feet of the other.



<sup>5</sup> 5 April 2026, *Sunday Echo He Saw and Believed EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD* YR A

<sup>6</sup> © 2005, Henri Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London p 85

<sup>7</sup> See © 2007, Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now Living in the Spirit*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London p 121-123

The scripture of our everyday life is telling us who dare to believe, that we are forever held by the One who will not stop searching for us and calling us home. We will never fall out of God for our home address is in God.

*"Here's the basin and towel, go wash your neighbour's feet."*