

Shapes for Living

Week 1 Relating

When Jesus washes his disciples feet, he teaches something radically new about how we are to value and belong to each other.

Below is a reflection by Jean Vanier* on the example of Jesus washing his disciples' feet from John 13:1-17 (NRSV version). It would help if all members of the group have a copy.

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Ask that someone read the following aloud:

"All groups, all societies, are built on the model of a pyramid: at the top are the powerful, the rich, the intelligent. They are called to govern and guide.

At the bottom are the immigrants, the slaves, the servants, people who are out of work, or who have a mental illness or different forms of disabilities. They are excluded, marginalised.

Here, Jesus is taking the place of a person at the bottom, the last place, the place of a slave. For Peter this is impossible.

Little does he realise that Jesus came to transform the model of society from a pyramid to a body, where each and every person has a place, whatever their abilities or disabilities....

The gospel message is the world upside down.... (Peter) does not understand that Jesus' answer shows that the washing of the feet is not a new ritual that we can follow or not or that we should accomplish at certain moments.

It is an essential part of his message to love.

It is the revelation that in order to enter into the kingdom we have to become like little children; we need to be 'born' from on high to discover who God is and who we are called to be.

It is only if we receive the Spirit of God that we can understand and live this message of littleness, humility and service to others."

(*From, 'Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John' by Jean Vanier. London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2004).

Do particular images or phrases stand out?

What makes this way of living so difficult?

How might this change our behaviour towards each other?