

Spirituality of unity

Word of life - April 2019

Even when we are faced with complex and tragic situations that are beyond our control, there is something we can and must do to contribute to the “good” of society. We can still engage with an attitude of generosity and responsibility, without expecting any kind of reward.

“So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn. 13:14).

When recalling the last few hours spent with Jesus before his death, John the Evangelist focuses on the washing of the feet. In the past, in the Middle East, this was a sign of welcome towards guests who had arrived after travelling on dusty roads. It was an action usually performed by servants.

It was for this very reason that the disciples at first did not want to let their teacher do this. However, he then explained,

So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet

Through this very meaningful image, John reveals the whole of Jesus’ mission: he who is Lord and teacher entered into human history to meet every man and woman, to serve us and lead us back to the encounter with the Father.

Day after day, throughout his earthly life, Jesus had constantly set aside every sign of his greatness, and that evening he was preparing to freely give his life on the cross. It was then that, as his legacy, he gave his disciples this teaching about which he felt so deeply:

So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet

It is a clear and simple invitation, one that we can all understand and put into practice immediately, in every situation and in all social and cultural contexts.

Having received the revelation of God's love through the life and words of Jesus, Christians “owe” something to their neighbours. They strive to imitate Jesus by welcoming and serving their brothers and sisters, thus becoming ambassadors of love. They aim to do as Jesus did: first by loving in practical ways and then by accompanying what they have done with words of hope and friendship.

Our witness is all the more effective the more we selflessly and freely turn our attention to the poor, while at the same time rejecting servile attitudes towards people who have power and prestige.

Even when we are faced with complex and tragic situations that are beyond our control, there is something we can and must do to contribute to the “good” of society. We can still engage with an attitude of generosity and responsibility, without expecting any kind of reward.

Moreover, Jesus asks us to bear witness to love not only personally, in all that we do, but also as a community, as a people of God whose fundamental law is mutual love.

So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet

After these words, Jesus added, "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."ⁱ

Reflecting on this phrase of the Gospel, Chiara Lubich wrote: "'You are blessed...'. The mutual service and reciprocal love that Jesus taught through this surprising action is, therefore, one of his beatitudes. How then will we live the word during this month? Jesus does not ask us to imitate him by blindly copying what he did, even though it remains as a shining and unbeatable example. Doing what Jesus did means understanding that our Christian life has meaning if we live "for" others, if we consider our existence as a service to our brothers and sisters and base our whole lives on this. Then we will have achieved what Jesus has most at heart. We will have lived the Gospel and will be truly blessed".

Letizia Magri

ⁱ 1 Cf. Jn 13:15-17.