

“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, usually done by servants, toward guests who had arrived after traveling on dusty roads.

It was for this very reason that the disciples at first did not want to let their teacher do this. But then, he 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 gesture, John reveals the whole mission of Jesus: he who is Lord and teacher entered into human history to meet everyone, to serve us and lead us back to the encounter with the Father.

Day after day, throughout his earthly life, Jesus constantly stripped himself of every sign of his greatness. That evening, as he was preparing to give his life on the cross, he gave as his legacy to his disciples this teaching.

“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 Jesus’ life and words, Christians “owe” it to their neighbors to strive to imitate Jesus. By welcoming and serving their brothers and sisters, they become ambassadors of love. They aim to do as Jesus did: first by loving in practical ways and then by accompanying those actions with words of hope and friendship.

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

Even when faced with complex and tragic situations beyond our control, there is still something we can and must do to contribute to the “good” of society. We can get involved generously, with a sense of responsibility and without expecting any kind of reward.

Moreover, Jesus asks us to bear witness to love in all aspects of our lives not only personally, 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” (Jn 13:15–17).

Reflecting on this phrase of the Gospel, Chiara Lubich wrote in a commentary to scripture in April 1982: “ *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 we 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