Exploring the Bible—Gospel of John (14)

Washing in Love

**Scripture Reading:**

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost. 2 And while supper was taking place, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, that he should betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going to God, 4 Rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself; 5 Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 He came then to Simon Peter. Peter said to Him, Lord, do You wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not know now, but you will know after these things. 8 Peter said to Him, You shall by no means wash my feet forever. Jesus answered him, Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. 9 Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. 10 Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is wholly clean; and you are clean, but not all of you. 11 For He knew the one betraying Him; for this reason He said, Not all of you are clean. 12 Then when He had washed their feet and taken His outer garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call Me the Teacher and the Lord, and you say rightly, for I am. 14 If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example so that you also may do even as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, A slave is not greater than his master, nor one who is sent greater than the one who sends him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:1-17)

**Ministry Reading:**

When the Lord washed the disciples’ feet, He laid aside His garments. We have seen that, in figure, garments here signify the Lord’s virtues and attributes in His expression and that the laying aside of His garments signifies the putting off of what He is in His expression. If the Lord had maintained the expression of His virtues and attributes, He would have been unable to wash the feet of the disciples. Likewise, whenever you are about to wash others’ feet, you need to lay aside your attainments, virtues, and attributes. This is real humility, the genuine humbling of yourself. We need to humble ourselves to such a degree that we can wash others’ feet.

In the Scriptures a garment signifies what we do and how we act. Whatever we do and however we act become our garment. If you have good behavior, you have an excellent garment, something that is beautiful and glorious. However, if you want to minister spiritual foot-washing to others, you must lay aside what you have attained, what you have been doing, and how you have been behaving. Every time you come together with the brothers to minister some spiritual foot-washing to them, you must lay aside the way you have conducted yourself. This means that you must humble yourself. Do not think that your conduct is good enough. Your deeds and behavior may have been very beautiful and glorious, so you became proud. You are proud of your garments, proud of what you have been doing. On the other hand, I may think in my heart that I am so humble and that you are too proud. With this kind of attitude and motive, we can never minister any foot-washing to others. I need to lay aside all of my good deeds and forget all of my virtues. This laying aside of the garments is very practical. Whenever you are proud, you can never minister spiritual foot-washing to anyone. You must be humble and lay aside your garments. To lay aside your garments means to humble yourself, to empty yourself, to take something off of you and to strip something from you.

Whenever we come together with the saints, on the contrary, we must take off our garments and forget our attainments. We must be carefully aware of this matter. We all have been guilty of this attitude. How often we have had the thought, “Oh, they do not know the church life; they do not know how to walk in the spirit; they have never learned the lessons of the inner life.” This is pride. If we take this proud attitude, we can never help others. We must lay aside our garments, our attainments, our spirituality. We must lay aside all degrees of spirituality and become simple and general, saying to ourselves, “I am nothing, and nothing within me is special. I have only a towel, a piece of cloth, to gird me.”

Not only do we need to lay aside the garments of our attainments, but we also need to be girded with a towel. This means that we must be bound, that we must lose our liberty. The feet were washed with water and also wiped with the towel with which the Lord was girded. In other words, the more we are willing to be bound for the sake of others, the more we shall be able to minister to others and wipe their feet. Otherwise, the more we are free, the more we shall damage others. Brothers, when we come together, we must not only lay aside our attainments, but we must also be bound and be willing to lose our liberty. We simply give up our liberty for the purpose of ministering something to our dear brothers and sisters. We must be willing to be girded and bound in order to minister something that wipes the brothers and sisters.

**Practice or Application:**

In the church life we cannot stay away from one another. In the family life the person who works the most gets the dirtiest. The same is true in the church life. The more responsibility you bear, the more dirt you collect, for the more people you must contact. The more you contact people, the more you will become dirty. This is the reason why a local church may be very happy at the beginning, but after a period of time some in it may have become dirtied. Although they still come to the meetings, they do not come pleasantly, with a pleasant spirit. Perhaps they will recall how certain brothers or sisters have offended them. They may attempt to smile and pretend to like others, but what kind of fellowship could they have? They need the foot-washing. They need the ministry of life.

In washing one another’s feet, we do not need to say, “Brother, I love you. I am going to wash your feet.” Foot-washing needs a great deal of life. We need life in order to wash others’ feet. Foot-washing requires much life to be ministered to others. This is quite difficult. Remember, foot-washing is by water, not by blood. We need much water. Water is the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. We need to be full of the life-water. If we are full of the life-water, we shall wash one another’s feet simply by being with them, without having any intention of washing their feet. When we are with others, the water just flows. It even flows unconsciously. As we are with another saint, the water will flow over him again and again, and his feet will be washed. The dirt and the unpleasant smell between us will be gone. We shall be brought into pleasant fellowship. How we need this!

By Loving One Another

Each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot-washing to them. Fellowship can be maintained between one another only when love ministers such a foot-washing. By putting these principles into practice, we shall see how real they are. You can simply apply them in your home life and in your church life from this very hour. Immediately, you will then minister some sort of foot-washing and wiping to your brothers and sisters. This is what we need. This is the real love that maintains the fellowship among us. It is by this kind of foot-washing and wiping that the spiritual fellowship can maintain the church life. Without it, the church life cannot be maintained, because the fellowship will have been damaged by the earthly touch. We need the spiritual foot-washing to cleanse us from the earthly touch and to keep our spiritual fellowship in a good condition. Then it is possible to realize the church life. If the church life is to be kept fresh, new, pleasant, and living, we continually need this foot-washing.

Question for Discussion: What is the spiritual significance of foot-washing? Why do we need it in the church life? Share your experience with one another.

Reference: Life-Study of John, Msg. 27-28