

Fervent Love

John 13:1-15, 34-35 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share 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, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 No one wants to wash feet. Even when our feet stay relatively clean within socks and shoes most of the day, we still consider them disgusting. How much more disgusting, then, when the feet have been sandle-shod on the dusty streets of Jerusalem all day, as the disciples' had been? No one wants to wash feet; it's a humiliating job, best left to lowly servants. Yet this is what the Lord Jesus rose from the table to do. He wrapped a servant's towel around His waist, took the washbasin, and began washing His disciples' feet.

2 Peter understood the problem with this situation. The Lord wasn't supposed to subject Himself to this kind of humiliation. So Peter sought to defend the Lord, objecting to having his feet washed. "What I am doing now you do not understand, but afterward you will understand," Jesus answered. So Peter relented. And Jesus, the Divine Son of God, the Eternal Word of God, God in human flesh, washed the feet of the twelve men who had followed Him as their Teacher. And then He commanded them, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one

another's feet. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

3 On the way to Jerusalem, the disciples had quarreled over who would sit at Jesus' right and left in His reigning over creation. Even as the Lord instituted His Supper, the disciples were disputing among themselves which of them was the greatest. And yet Jesus made Himself least among them, becoming the lowly servant. So He called them to love each other with the same self-sacrificial love, a servile love that sets one's honor and one's prestige aside for the sake of others.

4 This is your call as well: to love each other as the Lord has loved you. How well do you heed this call? Are you willing to be humiliated so that others might be served? Or do you bicker among each other even while gathered around the Lord's table over who is the greatest, who is the holiest, who is to be respected the most? Do you smugly smirk at the thought of how much more righteous, how much better of a Christian you are than those around you? Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less and thinking of others more. Repent of thinking highly of yourself. Repent of thinking of yourself at all. Repent of seeking your own comfort instead of the service of your neighbor. Repent of being afraid of humiliation.

5 You don't want to wash feet. But you want less to die. The love Christ exemplified is not merely a foot-washing love, a servile love. It's a dying love. Christ washed His disciples feet, willingly submitted to humiliation, to demonstrate to them His willingness to endure the humiliation of the cross. He isn't captured in the Garden of Gethsemane and dragged kicking and screaming against His will to die. At any point, He could have called legions of heavenly armies to destroy his assailants. He could have silenced Pilate with a stinging rebuke. He could have punished the crowds who cried for His crucifixion. He could even have done as they called Him to do from the cross. He could have saved Himself from this humiliating death. But He didn't. He died on the cross. This was no hero's death, not a soldier's valiant battlefield

death. It was a criminal's death, a shameful death, the kind about which you'd say, "Well, He had it coming."

6 He came, beloved, to shed His blood for you because of His great, fervent love for you. He came for this very purpose: to die the shameful death you deserved. He came to bear the crowd's ridicule, their mocking, their scorn, in your place. He came not to wash your feet with a basin of water, but to cleanse you with His blood shed upon the cross. He was the willing sacrifice, willing to die for you. And so He has cleansed you, not by washing your feet but by washing your life. In the waters of Holy Baptism, the Lord has washed you and made you clean, given you new life, forgiven your sin.

7 And the Blood He shed on the cross, the Lord gave to His disciples the night before. How can this be? Because the Lord's word does what it says. Take, drink, this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. The disciples who bickered who was the greatest while the Lord made Himself the least were the ones who had their sins forgiven in this sacred meal. Precisely because they needed forgiveness from the Lord, He instituted this Supper to bestow forgiveness.

8 Even still, Paul gives a warning against eating the Lord's Body or drinking His blood in an unworthy manner? What would make a person unworthy? If he assumed himself to be worthy of what the Lord offered, he would be unworthy. If he came presuming to be greater than his brother, he would be unworthy. If he came being impenitent for some sin, he would be unworthy. If he came harboring unforgiveness toward anyone, he would be unworthy. So, Paul cautions, "let a man examine himself," that is, confess your sins and come in contrition to the Lord's table. Come because you are not worthy of the treasures the Lord here bestows. Come because you need them, not because you deserve them.

9 These gifts, the Lord's Body and Blood are given for you, for your benefit, because of the Lord's great love for you. And these gifts enable you to do what Jesus commands in the Gospel reading: to love each other with a self-sacrificial love as He has loved you. The Lord hears and

answers your prayer that through the gifts of this meal He would strengthen you in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. He does. The Lord's Supper does precisely this: it enables you to love your neighbor, your brother, your enemies with the self-giving love Jesus had for you and calls you to have for others. Having had your sins forgiven, you are enabled to love each other fervently.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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