

HOMILY FOR HOLY THURSDAY

(April 9, 2020)

We are living in unsettling times, dangerous times, and paradoxical times. Every day we hear from health officials or politicians something to this effect: “**keep apart but remain together.**” That sounds like a paradox to me—keep apart, but remain together. How do you hold the paradox, the contradiction together? The keeping apart is a physical keeping apart; the remaining together is non-physical. We find living this paradox difficult because we are social beings and we were never meant to live apart.

Jesus, by washing his apostles’ feet, is breaking down the barriers we, not God, continually place between ourselves. There are no barriers on God’s part, but there still remains a lot of barriers on our part. Sometimes we prefer barriers, and walls, and fences to keep the undesirables out, to keep all the people who are not like us at a safe distance.



Just before Jesus actually washes his apostles’ feet, he does something really interesting. He took off his outer robe. This is not a practical gesture, like it will help him bend down easier and do a better job at washing feet. It’s not practical in the sense that he was trying not to get his outer robe wet.

No. It’s symbolic. With the outer robe gone, we get to see inside. We see who the Divine truly is. A foot washer. A servant. One who wants to host (not be hosted) you into all that you were meant to be. This is a revelation of the truth of who the divine is. Jesus is giving us a glimpse into the heart of God. The outer robe is gone—there’s going to be nothing between us and God. There’s going to be no distance between us, no barriers to separate us, no hidden agendas. This is

revelation. By taking off his outer robe, Jesus is revealing God’s desire. And God’s desire is to be close to us.

Another way this is spun out in the scripture, is in the passion reading we heard a few days ago from Matthew’s gospel. In Matthew’s Gospel, immediately after Jesus breathes his last and dies on the cross, it says that the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The curtain/veil of the temple refers to massive curtain separating the people from the innermost chamber of the Temple. This innermost chamber was called the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. It was so sacred that it had to be curtained off. Only the high priest had access to it, and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

Two words you don't have to memorize: *fanum* and *profanum*. In the word *profanum* you hear a word you are already familiar with, that is, the word "profane." The profane is the unholy. The fanum is the holy; the profanum is the unholy. What divides the holy (God) from the unholy (people), in the Temple is the curtain. When the curtain is torn, the Holy is free to run amuck into the world of the unholy. The Holy One, God, never wanted to be separated from God's people.



The tearing of the veil on Good Friday and the removing of Jesus' outer garment the night before is the same thing. God's desire is never to be quarantined, separated off, physically apart from God's people. Where we see barriers, and often times self-constructed barriers, God sees opportunities for revelation, closeness, and intimacy.

Jr. Paul