

Introduction

Talking with Archdeacon Richard recently, he told me of a doctor who, on meeting a patient, particularly if of more advanced years, would ask to look first at their feet before discussing any other health matters. The point is that if you're steady on your feet and caring for your feet you're less likely to fall. Our feet indicate if we're caring for ourselves, or if we've got circulation problems or even diabetes. Foot health might offer us a contemporary update on foot washing.

Jesus ministers to us in a way that helps us keep healthy. So he first wants to look at our feet, to make sure we're looking after ourselves. He wants to make sure we won't fall over. He wants to 'wash our feet' in a way that restores us and gives us hope, energy and direction. We all get tired from being on the road and we all need looking after. Our Lord is here for each one of us.

Safeguarding

The recent IICSA hearings, focusing on the Church of England, have brought all of us to the point of having to look again at whether we're really looking after ourselves and others. The fact is that, as a church, we need to repent of what we have not done as well as what we have done – to acknowledge again that 'there is no health in us', and we have fallen over. We have not done the basic things that keep us healthy. Safeguarding is a bit like looking after our feet: it's necessary so we can serve others, so that all can participate in the mission of Jesus. Lent is a time of repentance and of asking for renewal. May we as a church repent and seek renewal in this area of safeguarding. May we seek the cure of our own souls even as we offer it to others.

Pastoral Acedia

The image of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is one that we all find moving. It was both a genuine service – the disciples' feet really needed washing after a hot day on the roads – and a teaching. One of the interesting things about Pope Francis is his use of teaching-actions, as when, early on, he hugged someone with a severe skin condition. He wasn't wanting to impress us, he was teaching us: he was showing us practically that this person is a human being just like the rest of us! This was something he wanted to teach by actually doing something about it.

You could say that Jesus was giving us a model of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy – he was teaching us about his way of life by *doing* it. One of the things Jesus' example highlights is what we have come to recognise as 'pastoral acedia', which can develop in all of us who serve others.

Pastoral acedia is a kind of fatigue. Sometimes we've been ambitious but things haven't worked out. We become disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with ourselves. As the Pope says, we 'experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy' (J of G § 83). We lose touch with our own vulnerability and we lose an ability to feel compassion for the weak, including our own weaknesses. Jesus' response is not to let us stay in our heaviness, but to show us what it means to care for others by caring for us. So, today, "How are your feet? Are you road-weary?"

Anointed for Service

Jesus says to us 'If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet'. Jesus is teaching us not to become disillusioned with serving others and he's showing us why: 'If you know these things, you are blessed if you **do** them.' So here's that simple wisdom that can catch us again with its vision: if you want to be blessed, joyful, then act: serve others. If you're licensed or commissioned for ministry your joy is in your service of others, for your service will enable them to be joyful in their daily service of others in the wider world.

The symbolic significance of Jesus washing feet only makes sense in the application of it. You can't theologise about it if you want the blessing. On the other hand, the power of the symbols is such that it can motivate our action: it can feed us, lift us out of our heaviness, and encourage

us to return to our first love of serving others; helping us do those same things which powerfully symbolise Jesus' loving service of the world through his passion, death and resurrection. May I invite you come forward for an anointing to rededicate yourself to the one who washes our feet?