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Foot Washing

Katie Cassady

Katie is currently a volunteer manager for the Fransiscan Community Volunteer program. She has a Master of Arts degree in pastoral ministry. Katie's reflection on the service of foot-washing is a small part of her greater interest in the way we encounter God in our lived experiences.

I have recently been taken by the appearance, shape and variety of hands—the tools with which we toil and labor. The way they appear in response to the tasks that are asked of them; often resulting in a callused, arthritic, and spotted appearance. There are vast distinctions in the appearance of these appendages, made evident by their reverent placement during the Eucharist. Children's hands seem universally plump and un-marked by time or injury compared to those of their grandparents' generation. Farmers' hands are much tougher than the many manicured hands who have not tilled the land. Even acknowledging this evident wear and tear, we boldly hold, shake and share our hands with one another without much hesitation.

Conversely, feet, bear the brunt of our travels, our work, our weight, the elements, and beyond. They are perhaps, the great equalizer. There is very little a person can do to hide the vulnerability and truth carried by their feet. Feet, naturally divulge our age, our weaknesses, our health, our humanity. It is no wonder that a quick search on 'humility' reveals pictures of foot washing. There does not seem to be a more appropriate word to capture the lavishness of the act of one person embodying their care for another in a real and tangible act of service. No other

act quite captures the emptying of self that occurs on this Holy Day.

Like most Gospel principles, this act of humility can be performed both literally and metaphorically. Today I am thinking of the young man with whom I traveled on a mission trip, who shook as he sobbed, overwhelmed by the service of another toward him. I think of the camper I watched summers ago, who went so far as to kiss the feet that she gingerly washed. I am reminded of my favorite priest growing up, who washed my feet along with the feet of several others during Holy Thursday Mass several years ago. I think of the man at a Handicapped Encounter Christ (HEC) retreat who placed my foot in the basin on his lap, providing a service to me that might feel rare from the seat of his wheelchair. And I think of the metaphorical foot washing I have experienced: the Denver bus driver's generous sharing of self, the gift my mother made me for my graduation last spring, the blood my dad has given in remembrance of my birthday each year since I was born.

I think of the feet I have washed. I think of those who have washed my feet. And I rejoice in the living Word of John's Gospel this day.

