

GLORIFICATION
Homily for Maundy Thursday
LPC, 3/29/18

What does it mean to be glorified? To be glorified means to be exalted, praised, even worshiped.

Most of the time when the Bible talks about glorifying someone, it is in the context of praising God. In the Gospel of John however this usage often has a slightly different connotation. Of all the Gospels, John uses glorification language the most. The interesting thing is that most of these references occur in the section describing Jesus' Passion: his arrest, humiliation, torture and death... those portions of Jesus' life most people would consider the least glorious.

Tonight's Gospel reading from John marks the beginning of Jesus' Passion. This passage describes what Jesus says and does during his Last Supper with the disciples just before his arrest. Here in the space of just two sentences at the end of tonight's reading, John uses the words "glorify" and "glorified" a total of five times.

Most significantly, Jesus says that "Now" he has been glorified. Apparently, there is something particularly meaningful about this particular moment. Jesus is specifically glorified at this particular point in time. What is it about this particular moment that is so momentously glorious?

If we were asked to identify the particular events in Jesus' life in which he was momentously glorified, most of us would probably say Jesus' resurrection: when he overcame death as no one had ever done, signifying that death would no longer need be the final word for anyone.

If pressed for another example of Jesus' glorification, we might mention Jesus' ascension, when he was received into heaven, surrounded by angels to sit at the right hand of the Father in majesty for ever and ever.

A few of us might cite, as an example of Jesus' glorification, his triumphal entry in Jerusalem, which we celebrated last Sunday, when even the stones seemed to shout out Jesus' praises.

But the occasion cited in today's reading from John is not like those other occasions. It is something much different. What has just happened here in John that Jesus says here, as he has in none of those other episodes of apparent glorification, "*Now* the Son of Man has been glorified"?

Jesus has removed his robe, got down on his hands and knees, and washed the feet of his disciples, a humble, and some would say demeaning, thing for a master of disciples to do. Peter for one is shocked, interpreting the act as self-abasement. But this is not an act of self-abasement. This is a radical act of self-emptying. There's a difference.

There is a big difference between self-abasement, which is self-conscious groveling, and self-emptying, which is an act of completely selfless humility and love. In self-abasement one is a little ridiculous. In self-emptying love, one is glorified.

In a previous sermon I mentioned examples of self-emptying love being manifest in acts that, looked at another way, would be demeaning and self-abasing. To have to witness another person vomiting is disgusting. To hold back the hair of a beloved friend who is sick in the toilet is glorification in the terms demonstrated by Jesus. To handle the feces of another person is, in the abstract, a case of abasement. To change the diaper of a baby or an elderly relative in love is glorification in the terms demonstrated by Jesus.

In this simple act of foot-washing, Jesus' has redefined what it is to be glorified. And we know, from the story that plays out over the next three days, Jesus will be further glorified. And he will be further glorified in voluntary submission to humiliation, torture and death. Jesus submits to these things because, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. Jesus subjects himself to unspeakable treatment to show that there in fact is *no end, no limit* to Jesus' love.

The final lesson is this: Jesus asks nothing of us that Jesus himself is unwilling to do. Having done things that many of us would consider beneath us as self-respecting human beings, (and on the verge of doing even more, to the point of complete self-sacrifice), Jesus says, "Go and do likewise. Just as I have love you, you also should love one another."

As Jesus was glorified in self-emptying love, so we too are glorified in self-emptying love.

May Christ be glorified in us, in the type of self-emptying love Jesus showed his disciples on this night.