

It's easy to learn something well enough to parrot it back or regurgitate it onto the test paper. But an entirely different type or level of learning takes place when one understands something enough to see the purpose and/or implications of what they have learned. This is often the difference between a mere dabbler and a true master at that craft. When I watch a true master work at something I merely dabble in, my mind is often blown as the master's skills demonstrate just how much there is to learn.

A similar kind of dynamic seems to be happening for St. Peter in this snippet from St. John's Last Supper story. And even though Peter is the focus of the story, it is really such a common thing it could be any one of the disciples or any one of us. Peter objects to having his feet washed by Jesus. We are not told exactly why he objects. Whether it's because Jesus is the Master, the Messiah and the Son of God and washing Peter's feet is beneath Jesus' dignity in Peter's estimation; or if it's just Peter being a common man who is used to doing for himself and would object to anyone washing his feet, we simply don't know. Maybe it's some of each. But he caves in rather quickly when the alternative is to be written out of Jesus' project all together. And just as Jesus said, neither he nor the other disciples understand what this is all about.

Jesus goes on to tell them that it's an example for them about how to lead through service to others. And he really means service. Not just doing some nice, cushy office job and calling it service. He shows them it's service to the point of doing the dirty, and menial tasks of service that no one wants to do. Christian leaders, especially Apostles, bishops, priests and deacons need to learn and take this to heart.

There is another lesson that Peter and most of us need to learn that is also being taught by Jesus. When it comes to making salvation happen, removing the obstacle of the ancient sin and opening for us a path to the Father and to heaven, Jesus has to do this part by himself. This is a God thing. Saving ourselves is something that just cannot happen, we do not have it in us. As Jesus told Peter, “If you will not let me wash you, if you will not let me serve you in this way, if you will not allow me to do this for you, you can have no inheritance with me. You cannot inherit the Kingdom. You cannot inherit eternal life. You cannot be with me in paradise.” Just as St. Peter did we have to let Jesus be God and do what he needs to do. We must be able to set our pride aside and let Jesus be our savior because that’s the only way this salvation thing works. We do it Jesus’ way, because there is no other way.

To borrow from St. Paul, we preach Christ crucified, died and risen from the dead, present in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, a friend of the weak and downtrodden. Yes, it’s an absurdity and something many just can’t get past. But this is how Good chose to do our salvation. After we chose to sin, how our salvation, our redemption from sin, would unfold is something that was never up to us. This is God’s choice. We have to let God be God and call the shots.