

Do Likewise

By: Barbara Dickson

When I was small Easter meant egg hunts, candy bunnies, and a new dress and bonnet for Sunday services. I thanked Jesus for being the cause of such a great holiday.

I'm a little older now, and my Easter season brims with poignant reflections of Jesus' capture, trial, and death on the Cross, and His victory over death three days later.

I have collected many Easter memories over the years; some are precious moments of revelation.

One such moment came last Easter when I attended a Holy Thursday Catholic mass in New Jersey with family. The service honours Jesus' last meal with His disciples and His walk to the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest. Little did I know that I would witness a beautiful act of humility that would hurl me back in time to that Upper Room where Jesus spent His last hours on earth.

It seemed that the whole world filled the sanctuary; the rich, the poor, the elegant and the unrefined. It had rained all day making puddles, soggy shoes and wet clothes our common bond. Everyone was quiet in anticipation of something, something I didn't know.

It started with the echo of the cantor's chant bouncing off the vaulted walls. Everyone turned around and watched as the priest, starting at the back of the sanctuary, walked slowly down the long church aisle. Altar boys carrying a cistern, bowl and towels walked with him.

The priest stopped shortly and knelt down. Only a minute passed when he stood up and recommenced his journey toward the front. I was stumped. Through the mass of Easter worshippers I couldn't see what was happening. A few rows further, he stopped and bent down again.

I turned to my sister-in-law and started to whisper, "What's going on?" The crowd blocked my view. Here he came again, starting down the aisle. There! He paused just two pews behind me.

And then I saw. The priest, adorned in his white sacramental robe, was kneeling by a man's feet. He was slipping off the man's wet, dirty shoes and pulling off damp socks. He wrung out excess water from a towel dipped into the bowl. With the cantor's melodic chant still echoing throughout the sanctuary, the priest began to tenderly cleanse away life's care from the man's feet.

Only moments later, the priest arose and continued his walk. Fear gripped me. What if the priest chose my feet next? I cringed at the thought of a holy man of God getting down on his knees in servitude to wash my day-old, sweaty feet. But where could I hide?

Then it hit me. The reverend father was doing exactly what Jesus did when He rose from His last meal. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had grabbed a towel, took a basin, and on bent knees He washed His disciples' feet.

The priest too had become the servant, and imitating Christ, he was lovingly serving his congregation.

My chest burned. I was reacting like Jesus' disciple Peter when he announced to Jesus in the Upper Room, "You shall never wash my feet!" I could almost see Peter pulling his feet away.

I remembered Jesus' words, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." And "If I then have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

At that moment of revelation, I was transformed. At that moment I longed to have my feet washed and I longed to wash the feet of those around me.

At that moment I was transported back to that Upper Room surrounded by a few hundred of my close friends. ☪

