

Anointed to Serve
Homily for April 5 2020

On January 13th I began something called Exodus 90. The title comes from the book by that same name. Exodus 90 is a school of intentional living centering theme of liberation – similar to the liberation experienced by the Jewish people as they were freed by God from Egyptian bondage. The 90 refers to the length of the programme – it will conclude on Holy Saturday. Exodus 90 is a real gift to me. Over these days I have voluntarily entered into a time of deepening prayer, ascetic disciplines like going without alcohol, deserts, not making unnecessary purchases, not watching TV, movies, or sports and increased exercise. This part of Exodus 90 is like a double Lent. The third component focuses on fraternity. With six other men, we support each other through daily check-ins with one or two others in the group and Saturday meetings where the group gathers together. Over the past few weeks we have been having virtual meetings on Saturday.

As we know from the Book of Exodus to be freed from the influence of the world – represented by Egypt, and its attachments, does not come easily to us. At the heart of Exodus 90 is an invitation to help men understand that in their baptism and confirmation they have been anointed to serve. To live with the kind of clear focus requires choosing to be freed from those distractions that can leave us preoccupied by past times and pursuits that cloud our vocation as the baptized.

What this band of brothers and I started to do voluntarily, that is we freely chose to enter into this programme of prayer, asceticism and fraternity, we are all now doing involuntarily. I was really looking forward to Hockey Playoffs – which were scheduled to begin next week, during Easter. But now all of us are going without sports, to the delight of many wives, I am sure. The point I am making is life has brought us at this time into a particular kind of Exodus and we have choices to make. Will we allow this season, and especially this Holy Week be a time where we will be more centred in prayer, choose to use time wisely, choose to exercise disciplines of self-control around what we watch and eat; so that we can have a deepening experience of fellowship with those closest to us and the Lord?

Today's Gospel makes it clear that we have a choice as to how we will live this Holy Week. Will it be with the kind of generous self-giving that marks Mary's act of generosity, as she anointed Jesus' feet with the costly oil, or will be more self-serving like Judas Iscariot, who appeared to be concerned for the poor, but this was a ruse that detracted others from seeing his true motives.

Here is one of the beautiful things about today's Gospel where there is a connection between John chapter 12 and 13. Here in chapter 12 Mary anoints Jesus's feet because he is about to complete the reason for his coming, the Messianic work of the Priest, that is offering himself in sacrifice for our salvation. Remember the word Messiah, means "anointed one". Here we see a woman who so loves Jesus that she anoints his feet, so that in John thirteen we will see Jesus take a towel and wash the feet of his Apostles. John shows us that Jesus Christ was anointed by Mary to serve, just as at the beginning of his ministry he had be anointed by the Holy Spirit in His baptism to serve.

We are all called by virtue of being Christians, a word that means “anointed ones” to also serve. This is the nature of our baptismal vocation. Exodus 90 has helped me realize that vocation more clearly.

What an opportunity we have been given in these days of our COVID19 Exodus to find ways to serve that are comparable to Jesus washing the feet of the Apostles. Taking that time to support a friend via conversation by facetime, connecting with family on Zoom. Looking for ways to help with the family at home that are simple acts of service. Coming along side someone who is anxious in these days. As we live this week may we discover the gift presented to us to more fully embody what Isaiah said would characterize the Messiah when he came:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness. ¹

As we grow in intimacy with the Lord we will discover that we have been anointed to serve at this time and so be a light that can bring hope to others, so that for both them and us, our Exodus can be a time where we discover greater liberation and live with Mary’s generosity and Jesus’ willingness to serve.

¹ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Is 42:6–7). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.