

Holy Thursday (B) 04/02/2015

Have you ever **noticed** how **easy** it is for us to take **offense**? It might be, in truth, **easier** for us to **notice** when **someone else takes offense**. The **reaction** in the one **offended** is **immediate** and, depending on the degree of **offense** taken, it can leave a lasting **impression** on the **offender**. Then, of course, a **reaction** to the **reaction** can lead to an even bigger **explosion**.

It seems, for example, that each year around this time we hear or read about someone taking **offense** if anyone other than a **male** has their feet **ritually washed** on **Holy Thursday**. Thankfully, **Pope Francis** gives us another **model** to follow. He celebrates the **ritual washing of feet** each year **without discrimination**: men, women, and peoples of other faiths are all welcomed.

Taking **offense** comes so **easily** for us - I suspect - because we are well **practiced** at it. We **practice** each day **judging and condemning, discriminating and ranking**, that we do it **unconsciously**. When something happens, as a result, that doesn't fit into our way of doing things, we take **offense**.

It is this that we see in our **gospel story** from **John**. The **disciples** are - at best - **uncomfortable** with **Jesus** washing their feet. **Peter** - and possibly others - takes **offense**. They are **practiced** in **ranking**, and a person **ranked** higher than they are - like **Jesus** - does not wash the feet of those who are **ranked** lower - like they **rank** themselves. The

result is none are open to the love being expressed by Jesus.

Jesus, surprisingly, doesn't retaliate. He doesn't take offense. He, instead, gently informs Peter - and the other disciples - that practicing an openness to receive love is undermined by practicing a rating system. Peter's response - though somewhat exaggerated - is immediate. He is transformed. He no longer takes offense - which had caused him to contract. Now he is zealous to release the perceived offense, and to receive as much love as he possibly can!

Jesus also offers to his disciples and to us his very self. Yet, receiving Communion has caused some to take offense too. It all revolves around where one ranks. That is, a person's perceived worthiness.

The practice of receiving Communion is just that: a practice. It is practicing a willingness to receive what God offers to us without taking offense... at ourselves or at others. It takes practice, and can feel awkward initially... especially when we hear others saying something different.

Saint Paul, however, reminds us that as often as we eat Christ's body and drink his blood, we do it in remembrance of him... who comes to us and all people with love. Let us then practice *not* taking offense.