

## Tuesday March 23 – NATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION - John 13:1–5, 12-17 - keeping loving

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Today is a national day of reflection to mark a year of living under pandemic and to remember all those who have died of Coronavirus. Belfast Cathedral's 'Lives Reflected' project helps us do the same. There will be a minute's silence at noon, and people are asked to light up their doorsteps after dark. Prominent buildings and landmarks will also be illuminated across the UK. This may be a useful reminder to keep on taking the precautions that will help to keep other people healthy as well as ourselves. PERSEVERANCE continues to be the name of the game. We started these reflections on PERSEVERANCE with the temptations of Jesus. We end them in the last hours of Jesus' earthly life, as He shares a Passover meal with His disciples, and prepares them for all that lies beyond the traumatic events which are about to take place.

This is how John's Gospel begins to recount these events: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." We could equally well translate the original Greek this way: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." I find that an amazing and moving statement of Jesus' PERSEVERANCE. He never stopped loving His disciples. That might be understandable if they had been 100 per cent supportive all the way. But read the gospels again, and you find that, time after time, they just didn't get it; time after time they failed to grasp what He was doing. They argued amongst themselves about which of them was the greatest. Before long they would all desert Him, as He warned them. "The rest of them might, but I won't!" bragged Peter, who was soon to deny three times that he was a disciple or that he even knew Jesus.

But He never gave up on them. So the PERSEVERANCE of Jesus is all about His persevering love, that endures to the end and blossoms red at the cross.. George Matheson understood this when he wrote his hymn "O love that wilt not let me go" more than a century ago. He wrote other hymns, but this one he described as "the quickest composition I ever achieved. It was done in three minutes. It seemed to me at the time as if someone was dictating the thought to me, and also giving the expression."

John's Gospel describes Jesus' persevering love for those first faltering disciples. This is also Jesus' persevering love for *me*. I'm no more a glittering model of discipleship than they were. The wonder of it all is that my failures are not the last word on the subject. My relationship with Him is not secured by my religious track record; wonderful rather that it's based on a "love that wilt not let *me* go". I invite you to know that you can say the same.