



**A**ND the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 18 Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. 19 For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: 20 When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: 21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations. (Ex 30:17-21)

From the moment of birth until the moment of burial, it is necessary we be washed with water on a regular basis to prevent organisms of disease or even chemicals from damaging our health. One of the first events in a newborn baby's life is to be bathed with water. Always before dining, we should always wash our hands. Sanitation is an important feature of a healthy society. The necessity to wash is magnified by our going into environments that may breed a higher than normal level of bacteria and germs. Even a handshake with certain people may cause us to wash our hands as soon as polite to do so. Health-conscious people will always be a physically clean people.

There are different meanings to the word 'wash.' Our first example is physical – our second is spiritual.

Following the Invocation and Lord's Prayer during the Service of Holy Communion, and just before the reception of the elements, it is right and proper to repeat the Prayer of Humble Access in traditional Anglican Worship:

**W**E do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

Anglican worship of the Reformation kind is designed to show reverence to God and to glorify Him in all that we say and do. Each feature of the liturgy is based upon biblical themes. We do not go outside those biblical symbols and themes to invent added means of worship which often glorify man and not God.

Have you considered the biblical meaning of the Prayer of Humble Access to be said at that very moment in the Communion Service? It represents the Brazen Laver of the Wilderness Tabernacle. Read again our lead text for today's devotion. What was the position of the Brazen Laver at which the priest washed their hands and feet? Was it not between the Altar of Burnt Offerings at the entrance of the Tabernacle Gate and the Tabernacle proper? Why was this? Well, first, the Altar of Burnt Offerings meant that no proper worship of God could be performed without first bringing an offering to justify that worship. That is why the Altar of Burnt Offerings was at the entrance of the Tabernacle enclosure. God will not brood sin in His presence. So those sins must be remitted at the very entrance of the enclosure. . . . *without shedding of blood is no remission.* (Heb 9:22)

Once the sacrifice had been made at the Altar of Burnt Offerings, what was the next function of the priests? It was to approach the Brazen Laver and wash both hands and feet. It is this washing that is symbolized in the Prayer of Humble Access. We are pleading for a spiritual washing of our souls according to our sincere repentance of sin. It is only then that we may partake of the emblems of the Body and Blood of Christ. The elements of Bread and Wine are not physical elements of the Body and Blood of Christ, but rather spiritual symbols of His Real Presence. True worship will always be blessed by the real presence of our Lord: *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* (Matt 18:20) But in the observance of the Lord's Supper, our Lord is more profoundly present in His being at the Table which He has counseled us to observe – it is HIS Table!

Partaking of the Lord's Table does is not insure acceptance by God. That is the purpose of the Prayer of Humble Access. *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* (1 Cor 11:27-28) So, none being worthy, we appeal to the imputed righteousness of our Lord to be accounted worthy. If we make that appeal deceitfully, or hypocritically, we have no part with Him.

An example for the Gospel on the above matter is found in the Gospel of St. John: *5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. 6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. 9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. 10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.* (John 13:4-11)

The washing of the hands at the Last supper had already been performed err sitting to the Table, but the feet also must be washed. The hands are washed to cleanse us from our committed sins. Our feet are the means by which we travel into God-

honoring places, or into *vile temptation*. *Eve's feet carried her before the wrong Tree in the Garden*. The feet respond to the desires of their owner. So, once again, we see a purpose for the prayers of the Anglican (and biblical) tradition. The General Confession mentions two major categories of sin – those of commission, and those of omission. The hands commit sin – those are our actions. Those of omission are the good and righteous acts we fail to attend to. An example of this sin are those of the feet of the priest and of the Levite whose feet took them on the far side of the road in passing the robbed and beaten Jew on the Road to Jericho. The feet of the Samaritan took him to the place beside the man, and made his comfort of the man possible.

Even the pagan mind has some understanding of sin and the need to be washed of them. I invite to the bar the case of one Pontius Pilate, Proconsul of Rome, and traitor to justice. He was not what most would consider a bad sort. He recognized the injustice demanded of the Jewish rulers to our Lord Jesus Christ. He even attempted to ameliorate their anger and outrageous demands by offering a choice between an convicted murderer (Barabbas) and the Lord. But the Jews demanded to release the criminal and crucify the only righteous soul ever to live on earth! Pilate proclaimed, *I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him:* (Luke 23:14)

But Pilate was a politician of the same cowardly brand we see today. Read of his conniving:

**P**ILATE therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. 5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! 6 When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. 7 The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. 8 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; 9 And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? 11 Jesus answered, *Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.* 12 And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. 13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! 15 But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. (John 19:4-15)

Pilate, out of a sense of guilt, washed his hands. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, *I am innocent of the blood of this just person:* see ye to it. (Matt 27:24) Did that hand-washing do Pilate a whit of good? A thousand times NO! Except the Lord wash us of our sins, we remain in our sins – polluted and dying.