

Holy Thursday, 2008
St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

Most of you have probably heard of Mia Hamm, the star player for the U.S. soccer team. She scored tons of goals and led the U.S. team to win the Gold Medal at the Olympics and later to win the World Cup. But what you probably don't know is what an exemplary servant-leader she was. In her book, *Go for the Goal*, she wrote: "Soccer is not an individual sport. I don't score all the goals, and the ones I do score are usually the product of a team effort. I don't keep the ball out of the net at the other hand of the field. I don't plan our game tactics. I don't wash our training gear (okay, sometimes I do), and I don't make our airline reservations." Now, did you know that Mia Hamm washed the training gear of the team? You know, I've been trying to get Dc. Chuck to wash my coffee cups but he just won't do it. But folks, that is what real leaders – that is, the ones that people are willing to follow – do: they serve others, even to the extent of washing training gear.

In the gospel today, Jesus teaches His apostles, those preparing to be the future leaders of His Church, the same lesson: in order to lead, you must first learn how to serve. And Jesus teaches them by giving them a very surprising example: He washes their feet. And, you know, it takes poor St. Peter a little while to catch on: at first, he refuses to let Jesus wash his feet, and then he swings to the other extreme and he wants a shower and a massage! But finally, he gets it: Jesus is giving them an example of real leadership, which

requires humble service, doing things like washing others' feet, and washing the soccer team's training gear.

Folks, we all would like to be the leaders, the "Big Cheese," the "Head Honcho," the "Archdeacon"! But how many of us are willing to be leaders like Jesus wants, how many of us are eager to serve others humbly? I remember Bishop Sartain once telling us priests that at parish gatherings we shouldn't just stay for the food and then head home. We should also help to put up the chairs and tables, and help mop the floor. That's real leadership. A couple of weeks ago, I was walking around the parish grounds with a member of our parish council, and whenever we walked by some trash, he quietly picked it up and threw it away in the trashcan. That's inspiring leadership. There are many parishioners who come and serve food to the poor in our food pantry – and we serve hundreds every week! – and they get no recognition. That's humble service. Folks, if you've ever thought: "well, I'm not doing that," or "that job is below my dignity," then like St. Peter, you've missed Jesus' point. What it takes to be a leader according to Jesus' definition, is someone who is ready, willing and able to serve. This is what it means to be an apostle. And, just in case, you're wondering where would be a good place to start, there are still several dirty coffee cups on my desk.

Praised be Jesus Christ!