A somewhat common setup for a joke or plot device is that of a person being told that they have a finite amount of time left to live. In movies like 2007’s *The Bucket List* the result of the protagonists learning they have a limited amount of time to live is that they do stuff they have always wanted to do, but up until that point had never done. Knowing we have limited time to live can be an interesting way to focus our attention on what matters most. I am not positive what I would do if I was told I had 6 months to live, but I would probably do a lot of things involving nachos and sausage. However, in today’s Gospel it is not a hypothetical question. We are told that “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.” There it is, the clock is ticking and so what does Jesus do? Being the Son of God, we would expect that his actions would be different, but just how different is still kind of a surprise. In the stories we tell about what we would do with our limited time the actions generally center on our enjoyment and what would be best or at least most exciting for us. The thought being that we have to squeeze a lot of living into a very short period of time. But that is not what Jesus does. He doesn’t go on an all-night bender with Simon Peter or take a budget tour of the Pyramids. Instead, we read, “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.” Knowing that he has very limited time, Jesus makes the decision to take on the role of a servant. And not just any servant but the lowest of the servants – the foot washer.

Since Jesus was the only human to have done everything right in his time on earth, we cannot brush aside what he does but rather need to ask what his actions are telling us about a life well lived? In the moment where Jesus knew he was about to die and die in a particularly nasty way, he makes a conscious effort to take on the role of the lowliest servant. It says something countercultural about his priorities, but I think it also tells us something about where the path of total subservience to the will of God leads. The world tells us that we are just one spa treatment or wine tasting away from perfect happiness. Clergy these days are bombarded with messages about self-care and the need to take time and do things that feed us. No matter the profession or background, the model is the same – what from out there can be put in here to make us happy or content or whatever it is we want to call it. But the model that Jesus shows us is not that of taking something out there and putting it in here. Rather he asks what from in here can be put out there. Or as he says in Luke’s Gospel, “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.” It is the opposite of the way we think about most things, wherein we see everything in our life in the same way we see our nutritional well-being. With nutrition we need to consume the right things to feel better, build muscle or reach our ideal weight. Personal nutrition is all done by the careful cultivation of products to be consumed. But what if life was not based on such a model? What if life is, as Jesus demonstrates today, really about reaching out into other people’s lives and giving of ourselves?

Today, Jesus’ time was short and he realizes he did not have much time to sum up the totality of his life on this earth and to do so he takes the role of a servant. He tells the disciples, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” It is later. We have almost two thousand years between us and this event and hopefully we understand what Jesus was telling us. He was telling us that just as God has given so freely to us, we are to give freely to others. That is the model. For as St. Francis tells us, “It is in giving that we receive.” None of us really know what we would do if we were told that we had twenty-four hours left on this earth but Jesus shows us where our gaze should be. It should be out towards God and the world, loving and caring for those we come in contact with so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.