

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER 2018

On Holy Thursday 2017 Pope Francis visited a prison near Rome to wash and kiss the feet of twelve inmates. The twelve included three women and a Muslim man who had decided to convert to Catholicism. Previous Popes more usually held the Holy Thursday Mass in majestic basilicas. Francis changed the tradition to stress the importance of humility and going out to serve people who are poor, sick and imprisoned. Francis told the prisoners he was willing “to do the work of a slave in order to sow love among us.”

This is following the example of Jesus, who shocked his disciples by kneeling before them to wash their feet before sharing a meal. Peter's protests only cease when Jesus tells him he must accept. Foot washing is not a pleasant task. It means bending down, symbolising humble and obedient service. This was dirty work in Jesus' day, for the feet were probably crusty with filth and mud from the roads. It is usually the work of servants but Jesus takes on the task voluntarily, and he urges his disciples to do likewise.

The Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper – Holy Thursday – has always been understood as a celebration of the “First Mass” at Jesus' Last Supper. But I reckon that if you asked most people what they most remember about what happens on this night they will talk about the “washing of feet”. On another occasion Jesus said “Before you bring your gifts to the altar, go and be first reconciled with your brother and sister...” It's as if tonight he is saying “Before you come to Communion be prepared to wash his / her feet !”

Jesus calls all his followers to become servants to one another. We are asked to wash, to give, to love, to lend, to teach, to serve and to go beyond our comfort zones. Jesus calls us to be humble enough to serve others and to allow ourselves to be recipients of care and grace. We are reminded that this call to serve and be served should shape our lives in Christ.

Lord, we enter your presence with soiled feet, callused and dirty with the messiness of our lives. We have walked in the mire of selfishness and pride, not loving others as you have loved us. Set our feet on the paths of righteousness. Forgive us and make us clean. Amen