



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Velletri Correctional Facility (Rome)

Holy Thursday, 18 April 2019

[Multimedia]

I greet everyone and I thank you for the welcome.

I received a nice letter a few days ago from some of you who are not here today, but who said such beautiful things and I thank them for what they wrote.

I am closely united with everyone in this prayer: with those who are here and with those who are not.

We heard what Jesus did. It is interesting. The Gospel says: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands”; in other words Jesus had all the power, all of it. And then he begins to perform this gesture of washing feet. It is an act that slaves did at that time, because there was no asphalt on the roads and when people arrived, their feet were dusty; when they arrived at a house for a visit or for lunch, there were slaves who washed their feet. And Jesus makes this gesture: he washes feet. He performs the act of slaves: he who was all powerful, he who was Lord, performs this act of slaves. And then he advises everyone: “You also ought to wash one another’s feet”. That is, serve one another, be brothers in service, not in ambition, as one who dominates others or who oppresses others, no. Be brothers in service. Do you need something, a service? I will do it for you. This is fraternity. Fraternity is humble, always: it is serving. And I will make this gesture — the Church wants the Bishop to do it every year, once a year, at least on Holy Thursday — to imitate Jesus’ gesture and also to do good for himself with the example, because the Bishop is not the most important one, but he should be the greatest servant. And each of us must be servants of others.

This is Jesus' rule and the rule of the Gospel: the rule of service, not of dominating, of doing harm, of humiliating others. Service! Once, when the Apostles were arguing amongst themselves, they were debating "which of us is the greatest", Jesus took a child and said: "The child. If your heart is not a childlike heart, you will not be my disciples". A childlike heart, simple, humble but a servant. And there he adds something interesting that we can connect to this gesture today. He says: "Pay heed: those who are supposed to rule over nations, lord it over them ... but it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be a slave". We too must all be servants. It is true that there are problems in life: we argue amongst ourselves ... but this must be something that passes, something fleeting, because in our heart there must always be this love of serving others, of being at the service of others.

And may this gesture that I will perform today help us to be greater servants to one another, better friends, more like brothers in service. With these sentiments let us continue the celebration with the washing of feet.