



The Holy See

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

“Regina Coeli” Prison in Rome

Holy Thursday, 29 March 2018

[Multimedia]

Jesus concludes his discourse by saying: “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). Washing the feet. At that time, feet were washed by slaves: it was a slave’s task. People traveled by road. There was no asphalt. There were no cobblestones. At that time the roads were dusty and people’s feet got dirty. So at the entrance to the house there were slaves who washed one’s feet. It was slaves’ work. But it was a service: a service carried out by slaves. And Jesus wanted to offer this service, to set us an example of how we should serve one another.

Once, as they were walking along, two of the disciples who were opportunists asked Jesus if they could take up important positions, one on his right and the other on his left (cf. Mk 10:35-45). And Jesus looked at them with love — Jesus always looked with love — and said: “You do not know what you are asking” (v. 38). The leaders of the nations — Jesus says — command; they are served, and they are fine (cf. v. 42). Let us think of that era of kings, of such cruel emperors, who made the slaves serve them.... But among you — Jesus says — this must not be so; rulers must be servants. Your leader must be your servant (cf. v. 43).

Jesus overturns the historical and cultural customs of that epoch, and those of today too: in order to be a good leader, one who leads, wherever he may be, must serve. I often think — not of these times, because everyone is still alive and has the opportunity to change their way of life and we cannot judge, but let us think of history — if many kings, emperors, heads of state had understood this teaching of Jesus and if, instead of commanding, of being cruel, of killing people, they had done this, how many wars would not have been waged!

Service: there really are people who do not accept this attitude, arrogant people, odious people, people who perhaps do not wish us well; but we are called to serve them all the more. And there are also people who suffer, who are discarded by society, at least for a period, and Jesus goes there to tell them: 'You are important to me'. Jesus comes to serve us, and the sign that Jesus serves us here today, in the 'Regina Coeli' prison, is that he wanted to choose 12 of you, like the 12 Apostles, to wash your feet. Jesus takes a chance with each of us. Understand this: Jesus is called Jesus; he is not called Pontius Pilate. Jesus does not know how to wash his hands of people: he only knows how to take a risk! Look at this beautiful image: Jesus bent down among the thorns, risking to hurt himself by picking up the lost sheep.

Today I, who am a sinner like you, but represent Jesus, am Jesus' ambassador. Today, when I bend down before each of you, may you think: "Jesus took a risk with this man, a sinner, to come to me and tell me that he loves me". This is service; this is Jesus: he never abandons us; never tires of forgiving us. He loves us so much. See how Jesus takes risks!

And thus, with these feelings, we continue this ceremony that is symbolic. Before giving us his Body and Blood, Jesus takes risks for each one of us, and takes risks in serving us because he loves us so much.

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During the exchange of the sign of peace, the Holy Father added:

And now, all of us — I am sure all of us — want to be at peace with everyone. But often, there are conflicting feelings in our hearts. It is easy to be at peace with those we love and with those who do good towards us, but it is not easy to be at peace with those who have wronged us, who do not love us, with whom we are in a situation of hostility. In silence, for a moment, let each of us think of those who love us and whom we love, and let each of us think of those who do not love us and also of those whom we do not love and also — rather, indeed — of those against whom we would like to avenge ourselves. And let us ask the Lord, in silence, for the grace to give everyone, good and bad, the gift of peace.

After the prison director and an inmate offered farewell wishes at the conclusion of his visit to the 'Regina Coeli' prison, the Pontiff expressed some final thoughts. The following is a translation of his remarks, which he delivered in Italian.

You spoke of a new outlook: refreshing the view.... This does one good, because at my age, for example, cataracts appear, and one does not see reality well: next year the operation will have to

be done. But it happens this way with the soul: the work of life, weariness, mistakes, disappointments obscure one's view, the view of the soul. And for this reason what you said is true: take advantage of opportunities in order to refresh your view. And as I said [[at yesterday's General Audience](#)] in Saint Peter's Square, in many villages, but also in my land, when one hears the bells of the Resurrection of the Lord, mothers, grandmothers take the children to rinse their eyes so they may have the view of the hope of the Risen Christ. Never tire of renewing your view; of performing that operation on the cataracts of the soul, daily. But always renew the view. It is a good effort.

You all know about the half filled bottle of wine: if I see it as half empty, life is bad; it is bad. But if I see it as half full, I still have something to drink; the view that opens up to hope, a word that you said and [the director] also said; and she repeated it several times. You cannot imagine a prison like this without hope. The inmates are here to learn or to cultivate the "sowing of hope": there are no just — just! — sentences unless they are open to hope. A sentence that is not open to hope is not Christian, is not humane!

There are difficulties in life, bad things, sadness — one thinks about his or her family, thinks of mom, dad, wife, husband, children ... this sadness is bad. But do not let it get you down: no, no. I am here, but to be reintegrated, renewed. And this is hope. Sowing hope. Always, always. This is your job: to help sow the hope of reintegration, and this will do everyone good. Always. Every sentence must be open to the horizon hope. This is why the death penalty is neither humane nor Christian. Every sentence must be open to hope, to reintegration, also to offer the experience for the good of other people.

Water of resurrection, a new view, hope: I wish you this. I know that you inmates have worked a great deal to prepare for this visit, even painting the walls: I thank you. For me it is a sign of benevolence and of welcome, and I thank you very much. I am close to you; I pray for you; and you pray for me, and do not forget: water, which refreshes the view, and hope.