

Since he became Pope, Pope Francis has made the decision to break with tradition for this Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Traditionally, Popes have celebrated this Mass in the great Lateran Basilica in Rome, which is the Pope's Cathedral in Rome, or in St Peter's Basilica; but Francis, as Pope has continued a tradition which he introduced as Archbishop of Buenos Aires and so, to the surprise of the Catholic world, celebrated his first Holy Thursday liturgy in a local prison in Rome, at the Casal del Marmo detention centre for youth, and in 2015 at the Rebibbia prison. In 2014 he celebrated the Mass at a centre for the disabled, and last year at the reception centre for refugees seeking asylum.

This year, he is going to a prison again, and will wash the feet of prisoners; he has also broken with tradition by washing the feet of women, of Hindus and of Muslims.

Jesus, in the gospel, washes the feet of his disciples to remind them of the call to serve. He is their Lord and Master, and yet he performs a task that would normally be left to the lowest servant, the task of a slave - thus putting into practice his own words to the disciples : the greatest among you must behave as if he were the least, the leader as if he were the one who serves – just as the

Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. At the last supper, he tells them "If I, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, so you should wash one another's feet" in other words, you must put yourself at the service of others - this is true for Popes, Bishops, priests and deacons, but it is also true for us all.

And Pope Francis has changed the emphasis of this sign because he wants us to see that no-one is excluded - we are called to serve everybody, without exception, as Jesus himself did, to extend the hand of mercy to sinners, outcasts, those whom society rejects.

So this is the meaning, and the implication of Jesus's new commandment – Love one another as I have loved you, and he shows them what this will mean in practice by washing their feet. We serve not just those we like, but those we don't like, and those who we may feel have nothing in common with us, and especially those who are most in need. That has always been the Christian way, and it is directly linked to the other mysteries of the Mass we celebrate this evening. Christ is present in the Eucharist, but he is also present in the poor and needy.

What all this is teaching us is that we who share in the Eucharist, by implication, are committing ourselves to service, especially service of those most in need. The Catechism confirms this in para 1397, where it says : The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognise Christ in the poorest of his brethren.

So I leave these thoughts with you, these three themes of this evening – the priesthood, the Eucharist, humble service of others – all are connected and all of them are an indispensable part of our being as the Church. This Holy Thursday evening is a good time for us to reflect on them, and on our attitude to them.

