

ROMAN MISSAL

THIRD EDITION

The Washing of the Feet during the Evening Mass on Thursday of the Lord's Supper

On the authority of Pope Francis, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments [CDWDS] issued a Decree and a Commentary on 6 January 2016 changing the rubric for the Washing of the Feet during the Evening Mass on Thursday of the Lord's Supper. Here is the English rubric with the edits:

~~The men who have been chosen are~~ Those who have been chosen from amongst the people of God **are led by the ministers to seats prepared in a suitable place. Then the Priest (removing the chasuble if necessary) goes to each one, and, with the help of the ministers, pours water over each one's feet and then dries them.**

By the action of the Apostolic See, those chosen for the foot washing is open to all members of the People of God – boys and girls, women and men. Those chosen for the foot washing reflect all who make up the People of God, the disciples of the Lord.

In the account of the Last Supper in the Gospel of John, the Good News proclaimed during the Holy Thursday Evening Mass, Jesus washes the feet of an unspecified number of disciples. Just as the “beloved disciple” is nameless so that it may be, in fact, every hearer who is the beloved one, the “disciples” are all of us as well. This *mandatum*, this love command to be of service, to be servants is given to each one of the baptized.

Some feet are washed during the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper as another reminder to be like Jesus. No task, no service, no gesture is beneath those who bear the name Christian.



The Mass and Its Parts – Navigating the *Roman Missal*

The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be greatly increased if the texts of the readings, the prayers, and the liturgical chants correspond as aptly as possible to the needs, the preparation, and the culture of the participants. GIRM, no. 352.

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◆ 22 February 2016, revised, Eliot Kapitan ◆

Changes to the *Missale Romanum, iuxta typicam tertiam*

Revised 6 January 2016

LOTIO PEDUM

11. ~~Viri selecti deducuntur~~ Qui selecti sunt ex populo Dei deducuntur a ministris ad sedilia loco apto parata. Tunc sacerdos (deposita, si necesse sit, casula) accredit ad singulos, eisque fundit aquam super pedes et abstergit, adiuvantibus ministris.

Changes to the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*

Revised 6 January 2016

THE WASHING OF THE FEET

10. After the Homily, where a pastoral reason suggests it, the Washing of the Feet follows.
11. Those who have been chosen from amongst the people of God are led by the ministers to seats prepared in a suitable place. Then the Priest (removing the chasuble if necessary) goes to each one, and, with the help of the ministers, pours water over each one's feet and then dries them.
12. Meanwhile some of the following antiphons or other appropriate chants are sung.

Changes to the *Misal Romano, novena edición [México]*

Revised 6 January 2016

LAVATORIO DE LOS PIES

6. ~~Los varones designados para el rito van acompañados~~ Los que han sido designados de entre el pueblo de Dios son acompañados por los ministros, a ocupar los asientos preparados para ellos en un lugar visible.
El celebrante, quitada la casulla si es necesario, se acerca a cada una de las personas designadas y, con la ayuda de los ministros, les lava los pies y se los seca.

Q & A

- Q:** How many persons are chosen to have feet washed? Should it be, must it be 12?
- A:** In the Gospel of John read that night, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. Neither the Gospel nor the Missal specifies a set number. The parish chooses.
- Q:** Are both feet washed for each person?
- A:** Yes. The rubric states this procedure: "pours water over each one's feet and then dries them."
- Q:** Is the Washing of the Feet required?
- A:** No. It is an option. The criterion indicated in the rubric is: "where a pastoral reason suggests it." This is a pastoral judgment to be determined by the proper pastor, parochial administrator, or priest moderator in light of the local circumstances.

Decree

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20160106_decreto-lavanda-piedi_en.html

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

DECREE

IN MISSA IN CENA DOMINI

The restoration of Holy Week, with the decree *Maxima Redemptionis nostrae mysteria* (30 November 1955), granted the faculty for the washing of feet of twelve men during the Mass of the Lord's Supper after the reading of the Gospel according to John, where a pastoral reason recommended it, in order to demonstrate in an almost representative way the humility and charity of Christ towards his disciples.

In the Roman Liturgy this rite was handed down with the name of the *Mandatum* of the Lord concerning fraternal charity from the words of Jesus (cf Jhn 13:34), which are sung in an Antiphon during the celebration.

In performing this rite Bishops and priests are invited to intimately conform themselves to Christ who «came not to be served but to serve» (Mt 20:28) and, compelled by charity «to the end» (Jhn 13:1), to give his life for the salvation of the whole human race.

In order that the full meaning of this rite might be expressed to those who participate it seemed good to the Supreme Pontiff Pope Francis to vary the norm which is found in the rubrics of the *Missale Romanum* (p. 300 n. 11): «The men who have been chosen are led by the ministers...», which therefore must be changed as follows: «Those who are chosen from amongst the people of God are led by the ministers...» (and consequently in the *Caeremoniali Episcoporum* n. 301 and n. 299b: «seats for those chosen»), so that pastors may select a small group of the faithful to represent the variety and the unity of each part of the people of God. Such small groups can be made up of men and women, and it is appropriate that they consist of people young and old, healthy and sick, clerics, consecrated men and women and laity.

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, in virtue of the faculties granted by the Supreme Pontiff, introduces this innovation into the liturgical books of the Roman Rite, reminding pastors of their responsibility to adequately instruct both the chosen faithful as well as all others so that they may participate consciously, actively and fruitfully in the rite.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 6 January 2016, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

Robert Card. Sarah
Prefect

+ Arthur Roche
Archbishop Secretary

Congregation Commentary on the Decree

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20160106_commento-decreto-lavanda-piedi_en.html

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

COMMENTARY CONCERNING THE DECREE *IN MISSA IN CENA DOMINI*

I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE

With the [decree *In Missa in cena Domini*](#) the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, at the request of the Holy Father, has readjusted the rubric of the *Missale Romanum* regarding the washing of feet (p. 300 n. 11), variously linked down the centuries with Holy Thursday and which, from the reform of Holy Week in 1955, could also take place during the evening Mass that begins the Paschal Triduum.

Illuminated by the gospel of John the rite carries a double significance: an imitation of what Christ did in the Upper Room washing the feet of the Apostles and an expression of the self-gift signified by this gesture of service. It is not by accident this is called the *Mandatum* from the *incipit* of the antiphon which accompanied the action: «Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos, dicit Dominus» (Jhn 13:14). In fact the commandment to fraternal love binds all the disciples of Jesus without any distinction or exception.

Already in an old *ordo* of the 7th century we find the following: «Pontifex suis cubicularibus pedes lavat et unusquisque clericorum in domo sua». Applied differently in the various dioceses and abbeys it is also found in the Roman Pontifical of the 12th century after Vespers on Holy Thursday and in the Pontifical of the Roman Curia of the 13th century («facit mandatum duodecim subdiaconos»). The *Mandatum* is described as follows in the *Missale Romanum* of Pope Saint Pius V (1570): «Post denudationem altarium, hora competenti, facto signo cum tabula, conveniunt clerici ad faciendum mandatum. Maior abluat pedes minoribus: tergit et osculatur». It takes place during the singing of antiphons, the last of which is *Ubi caritas* and is concluded by the *Pater noster* and a prayer which links the commandment of service with purification from sins: «Adesto Domine, quaesumus, officio servitutis nostrae: et quia tu discipulis tuis pedes lavare dignatus es, ne despicias opera manuum tuarum, quae nobis retinenda mandasti: ut sicut hic nobis, et a nobis exterioria abluuntur inquinamenta; sic a te omnium nostrum interiora laventur peccata. Quod ipse praestare digneris, qui vivis et regnas, Deus, per omnia saecula saeculorum». Enlightened by the gospel which has been heard during the morning Mass, the carrying out of this action is reserved to the clergy («conveniunt clerici») and the absence of an instruction to have “twelve” would seem to indicate that what counts isn’t just imitating what Jesus did in the Upper Room but rather putting the exemplary value of what Jesus did into practice, which is expected of all his disciples.

The description of the «De Mandato seu lotionem pedum» in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* of 1600 is more detailed. It mentions the custom (after Vespers or at lunchtime, in a church, a chapter room or a suitable place) of the Bishop washing, drying and kissing the feet of “thirteen” poor people after having dressed them, fed them and given them a charitable donation. Likewise this could be done to thirteen canons, according to the local custom and wishes of the Bishop, who might choose poor people even where it is the practice that they be canons: «videtur enim eo pacto maiorem humilitatem, et charitatem prae se ferre, quam lavare pedes Canonicis». This meaningful gesture of the washing of

feet, although not applied to the entirety of the people of God and reserved to the clergy, did not exclude local customs which take into account the poor or young people (e.g. the *Missale Parisiense*). The *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* expressly prescribed the *Mandatum* for cathedrals and collegiate churches.

With the reform of Pius XII which once more moved the *Missae in cena Domini* to the evening, the washing of feet could take place, for pastoral reasons, during the Mass, after the homily for «duodecim viros selectos», placed «in medio presbyterii vel in ipsa aula ecclesiae»; the celebrant washes and dries their feet (the kiss is no longer mentioned). This now goes beyond the rather clerical and reserved sense, taking place in the public assembly with the direction for «twelve men» which makes it more explicitly an imitative sign, almost a sacred representation, that facilitates what Jesus did and had in mind on the first Holy Thursday.

The *Missale Romanum* of 1970 retained the recently reformed rite, simplifying some elements: the number «twelve» is omitted; it takes place «in loco apto»; it omits one antiphon and simplifies the others; *Ubi caritas* is assigned to the presentation of gifts; the concluding part is omitted (*Pater noster*, verses and prayer), as this formerly took place outside of the Mass. The reservation solely to «viri» however remained for mimetic value.

The current change foresees that individuals may be chosen from amongst all the members of the people of God. The significance does not now relate so much to the exterior imitation of what Jesus has done, rather as to the meaning of what he has accomplished which has a universal importance, namely the giving of himself «to the end» for the salvation of the human race, his charity which embraces all people and which makes all people brothers and sisters by following his example. In fact, the *exemplum* that he has given to us so that we might do as he has done goes beyond the physical washing of the feet of others to embrace everything that such a gesture expresses in service of the tangible love of our neighbour. All the antiphons proposed in the *Missale* during the washing of feet recall and illustrate the meaning of this gesture both for those who carry it out and for those who receive it as well as for those who look on and interiorise it through the chant.

The washing of feet is not obligatory in the *Missae in cena Domini*. It is for pastors to evaluate its desirability, according to the pastoral considerations and circumstances which exist, in such a way that it does not become something automatic or artificial, deprived of meaning and reduced to a staged event. Nor must it become so important as to grab all the attention during the Mass of the Lord's Supper, celebrated on «the most sacred day on which our Lord Jesus Christ was handed over for our sake» (i.e. *Communicantes* of the Roman Canon for this Mass). In the directions for the homily we are reminded of the distinctiveness of this Mass which commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, of the priestly Order and of the new commandment concerning fraternal charity, the supreme law for all and towards all in the Church.

It is for pastors to choose a small group of persons who are representative of the entire people of God – lay, ordained ministers, married, single, religious, healthy, sick, children, young people and the elderly – and not just one category or condition. Those chosen should offer themselves willingly. Lastly, it is for those who plan and organise the liturgical celebrations to prepare and dispose everything so that all may be helped to fruitfully participate in this moment: the *anamnesis* of the “new commandment” heard in the gospel which is the life of every disciple of the Lord.

+ Arthur Roche

Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

USCCB Statement

The Bishops' Committee for Divine Worship has provided helpful guidance on the washing of feet since 1987.

NCCB, Committee for the Liturgy [BCL], 16 February 1987.

See – BCL *Newsletter*, February 1987, Volume XXIII, pages 1043 -1044.

See – Volume XXXIV, January 1998, pages 1571-1572.

USCCB website, Committee for Divine Worship, March 2012, March 2014, and July 2014

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/triduum/holy-thursday-mandatum.cfm>

Holy Thursday Mandatum

Question: My parish liturgy committee has decided to allow both men and women to take part in the washing of the feet at the liturgy on Holy Thursday. I have always heard that only men may have their feet washed. Which does the Church allow?

Response: The rubric for Holy Thursday, under the title THE WASHING OF THE FEET, reads:

"After the Homily, where a pastoral reason suggests it, the Washing of Feet follows. The men who have been chosen (*virii selecti*) are led by the ministers to seats prepared in a suitable place. Then the priest (removing his chasuble if necessary) goes to each one, and, with the help of the ministers, pours water over each one's feet and then dries them."

Regarding the phrase *virii selecti*, the Chairman of the then-Committee on the Liturgy, after a review of the matter by the committee, authorized the following response which appeared in the *Newsletter* of February 1987:

Question: What is the significance of the Holy Thursday foot washing rite?

Response:

1. The Lord Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper as a sign of the new commandment that Christians should love one another: "Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: by your love for one another" (see John 13, 34-35). For centuries the Church has imitated the Lord through the ritual enactment of the new commandment of Jesus Christ in the washing of feet on Holy Thursday.

2. Although the practice had fallen into disuse for a long time in parish celebrations, it was restored in 1955 by Pope Pius XII as a part of the general reform of Holy Week. At that time the traditional significance of the rite of foot washing was stated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the following words: "Where the washing of feet, to show the Lord's commandment about fraternal charity, is performed in a Church according to the rubrics of the restored Ordo of Holy Week, the faithful should be instructed on the profound meaning of this sacred rite and should be taught that it is only proper that they should abound in works of Christian charity on this day." ¹

3. The principal and traditional meaning of the Holy Thursday *mandatum*, as underscored by the decree of the Congregation, is the biblical injunction of Christian charity: Christ's disciples are to love one another. For this reason, the priest who presides at the Holy Thursday liturgy portrays the biblical scene of the gospel by washing the feet of some of the faithful.

4. Because the gospel of the *mandatum* read on Holy Thursday also depicts Jesus as the "Teacher and Lord" who humbly serves his disciples by performing this extraordinary gesture which goes beyond the laws of hospitality,² the element of humble service has accentuated the celebration of the foot washing rite in the United States over the last decade or more. In this regard, it has become customary in many places to invite both men and women to be participants in this rite in recognition of the service that should be given by all the faithful to the Church and to the world. Thus, in the United States, a variation in the rite developed in which not only charity is signified but also humble service.

5. While this variation may differ from the rubric of the Sacramentary which mentions only men ("viri selecti"), it may nevertheless be said that the intention to emphasize service along with charity in the celebration of the rite is an understandable way of accentuating the evangelical command of the Lord, "who came to serve and not to be served," that all members of the Church must serve one another in love.

6. The liturgy is always an act of ecclesial unity and Christian charity, of which the Holy Thursday foot washing rite is an eminent sign. All should obey the Lord's new commandment to love one another with an abundance of love, especially at this most sacred time of the liturgical year when the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection are remembered and celebrated in the powerful rites of the Triduum.³

Notes

¹ Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Correct Use of the Restored Ordo of Holy Week, November 16, 1955 (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference Publications Office, 1955), page 6.

² In biblical times it was prescribed that the host of a banquet was to provide water (and a basin) so that his guests could wash their hands before sitting down to table. Although a host might also provide water for travelers to wash their own feet before entering the house, the host himself would not wash the feet of his guests. According to the Talmud the washing of feet was forbidden to any Jew except those in slavery.

In the controversies between Hillel and Shammai (cf. Shabbat 14a-b) Shammai ruled that guests were to wash their hands to correct "tumat yadayim" or "impurity of hands" (cf. Ex 30, 17 and Lv 15, 11). Priests were always to wash their hands before eating consecrated meals. The Pharisees held that all meals were in a certain sense "consecrated" because of table fellowship.

Jesus' action of washing the feet of his disciples was unusual for his gesture went beyond the required laws of hospitality (washing of hands) to what was, in appearance, a menial task. The Lord's action was probably unrelated to matters of ritual purity according to the Law.

³ For a brief overview of the restoration of the foot washing rite in 1955, see W. J. O'Shea, "Mandatum," New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume IX, 146, and W. J. O'Shea, "Holy Thursday," New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VII, 105-107; Walter D. Miller, Revised Ceremonial of Holy Week (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1971), p. 43. See also Prosper Gueranger, OSB, The Liturgical Year, Volume VI, Passiontide and Holy Week (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1949), pp. 395-401. For the historical background of the many forms of this rite, see the following studies: Pier Franco Beatrice, *La lavanda dei piedi: Contributo alla storia delle antiche liturgie cristiane* (Rome: C.L.V. Edizioni Liturgiche, 1983); "Lotio pedum" in Hermann Schmidt, *Hebdomada Sancta*, Volume II (Rome: Herder, 1956-1957); Annibale Bugnini, CM, and C. Braga, CM, *Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae Instauratus in Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae" Sectio Historica 25* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgicae, 1956), pp. 73-75; Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 81.

This is the latest statement of this Secretariat on the question. No subsequent legislation or instructions have necessitated a modification in the statement.

Bulletin Shorts on Washing Feet



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The washing of feet during the Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper reminds us all of the necessary humility and service manifested by all the Christian faithful. Pope Francis now formally authorizes for all what he himself has done – wash feet of all kinds of people. Those who are chosen for this rite are not more holy than any other member of the parish. They are chosen this year as reminder to us all: love tenderly, act humbly, do mercy work. Let these actions be done to me so I can then do them for others.

Why does the priest wash feet of boys and girls, women and men on Holy Thursday?

That in imitating Jesus' humble service, we remind ourselves today to be like him. No task is unworthy, no service is beneath the dignity of the Christian. This **mandatum**, this **command** to act in love is in our baptismal DNA.

We carry this action further this night. The Mass rubrics (rules) remind us that the entire collection taken during the Evening Mass is given to the poor. This **mandatum** and collection prepares us for the **meal** of the Lord.



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April 17, 2014
VATICAN—Pope Francis visited the Don Gnocchi Center in Rome today to wash the feet of 12 residents for the Holy Week ritual.