

Practice Note

Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday Night

In January 2016, it was announced that Pope Francis had decreed that the norms of the *Missale Romanum* that touch on the washing of feet during the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper celebrated on the night of Holy Thursday had been amended. The substance of this amendment is to widen the groups from which those who will have their feet washed can be chosen.

This Practice Note sets out the former and new norms for the sake of clarity, and in order to assist parishes in their planning for the celebration of the Sacred Paschal Triduum.

Former Norm

The former norm for the Washing of Feet is found in the rubrics of no. 11, to be found on page 331 of the edition of the *Roman Missal* authorised for use in Australia.

This norm reads in full:

11. The men who have been chosen 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.

A strict reading of this rubric would restrict the choice of those who will have their feet washed to men only. While pastoral practice has seen this rubric widely honoured in the breach, the intent of the norm is clear.

New Norm

By decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments dated 6th January, 2016, this norm has been amended to read thus:

11. Those who are chosen 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.

The Congregation notes in the same decree that the changes are intended in order "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”.

Additional Comments

The following additional comments are made in order to provide clarity and assistance to parishes preparing for the celebration of the Sacred Paschal Triduum:

1. The number of people who are to have their feet washed is not specified. Though there is some traditional understanding that the number should be twelve, there is no mention in the liturgical ritual of any number. The 2016 decree of the Congregation indicates “a small group” which could be interpreted according to local pastoral needs (and availability of numbers).
2. The inclusion of the Washing of Feet is an optional part of the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper. The rubrics of no. 10 specify “After the Homily, where a pastoral reason suggests it, the Washing of Feet follows.” It follows that the choice to include the Washing of Feet in the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper is a positive choice, i.e. the choice must be deliberately made for “a pastoral reason”.
3. The inclusion of the Washing of the Feet is a very powerful ritual action and symbol, and has a very significant catechetical underpinning that reminds those assembled to celebrate on Holy Thursday evening of the significance of Christ’s call to mission and service.

The Diocesan Liturgy Council strongly encourages the inclusion of the Washing of the Feet in celebrations of the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper.

Rev Andrew Doohan

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

on behalf of the Diocesan Liturgy Council. February, 2016

