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Jubilee audience: mercy and service

Vatican City, 12 March 2016 – "Be merciful like the Father means following Jesus on the path of service", said Pope Francis to the more than twenty thousand people who attended the Saturday Jubilee audience in St. Peter's Square this morning, commenting in his catechesis on the passage from the Gospel of St. John, which narrates how Jesus, the night before He went to die, washed His disciples' feet.

"Jesus performed a gesture that is engraved in the memory of the disciples: the washing of the feet", explained the Pope. "An unexpected and surprising gesture, to the extent that Peter did not wish to accept it. I would like look more closely at Jesus' final words: 'Do you understand what I have done for you? … Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet'. In this way, Jesus shows his disciples that service is the path to follow if they wish to live their faith in Him and to give witness to His love. Jesus applies to Himself the image of the 'Servant of God' used by the prophet Isaiah. He, Who is the Lord, makes Himself a servant".

Washing the feet of the apostles, Jesus "wished to reveal God's way of acting towards us, and to give an example of his 'new commandment' to love one another as He has loved us, that is giving His life for us. John too writes in his first letter, 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. … Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth'".

Love, then, is "the concrete service we lend to each other. Love is not words, it is work and service. A humble service, performed in silence and concealed, as Jesus Himself said: 'When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing'". And this service is shown also when "we make available to the community the gifts the Holy Spirit has granted us, so that it may grow", and when "we share material goods so that no-one may be in need. This sharing and dedication to those in need is a style of life that God suggests also to many non-Christians, as a way of authentic humanity".

"Finally, we must not forget that in washing the feet of His disciples and asking them to do the same, Jesus also invites us to confess our shortcomings to one another and to pray for each other to know how to forgive from the heart", emphasised Francis. "In this respect, let us remember the words of the bishop St. Augustine, who wrote that 'Nor should the Christian think it beneath him to do what was done by Christ. For when the body is bent at a

brother's feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present. … Let us therefore forgive one another his faults, and pray for one another's faults, and thus in a manner be washing one another's feet'".

"Love and charity, are service, helping others, serving others. There are many people who spend their lives in this way, in the service of others. … When you forget yourself and think of others, this is love! And with the washing of the feet the Lord teaches us to be servants, and above all, servants as He was a servant to us, for every one of us", concluded the Pope.