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Holy Mass “in Coena Domini” in the Velletri Correctional Facility, Rome

At 15.30 this afternoon, Holy Thursday, the Holy Father Francis left the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* to pay a visit to the correctional facility in Velletri, Rome, for the celebration of Holy Mass *in Coena Domini*.

Upon arrival, at around 16.30, the Pope was received by the director of the penitentiary, Dr. Maria Donata Iannantuono, by the deputy director, Dr. Pia Palmeri, by the commander of the Penitentiary Police, Dr. Maria Luisa Abossida, and by the chaplain, Don Franco Diamante.

The Holy Father then greeted some representatives of the civil staff, the police, and the detainees. At 16.45, in the penitentiary theatre, he presided at the celebration of Mass *in Coena Domini*, with the rite of the washing of the feet, the beginning of the Easter Triduum.

After the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, the Pope gave an improvised homily. Then, during the Rite, he washed the feet of twelve detainees from four different countries: nine Italian, one Brazilian, one from Côte d'Ivoire and one from Morocco.

At the end of the celebration, after the greeting from the director of the correctional facility and the exchange of gifts, the Holy Father returned to the Vatican.

The following is the text of the off-the-cuff homily that the Holy Father delivered after the proclamation of the Holy Gospel:

Homily of the Holy Father

I greet you all and I thank you for your welcome.

I received a beautiful letter a few days ago, from some of you who today will not be here, but who said such

beautiful things, and I thank them for what they have written.

In this prayer I am very united with you all: those who are here and those who are not.

We have heard what Jesus did. It is interesting. The Gospel says: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power", or rather, Jesus had all the power, all of it. And then he begins to perform this gesture of washing the feet. It is a gesture that slaves performed in that time, because there was no asphalt on the streets and the people, when they arrived, had dust on their feet, when they arrived in a house for a visit or for lunch, there were slaves who washed their feet. And Jesus performs this gesture: as a slave. And then He advises them all: "You should also wash one another's feet". That is, serve one another, be brothers in service, not in ambition, not as one who dominates the other or tramples the other, no, be brothers in service. You need something, a service? I will do it for you. This is fraternity. Fraternity is humble, always: it is service. And I will perform this gesture – the Church wants the bishop to do this every year, once a year, at least on Holy Thursday – to imitate Jesus' gestures and also to do good by example and also to oneself, because the bishop is not the most important, but must be the one who serves the most. And each one of us must be a servant to others.

This is Jesus' rule and the rule of the Gospel: the rule of service, of not dominating or doing harm, humiliating others. Service! Once, when the apostles were quarrelling between themselves, arguing about who was the most important among them, Jesus took a child and said "The child. If your heart is not the heart of a child, you will not be my disciples". The heart of a child, simple, humble but serving. And there He adds something interesting that we can connect to this gesture of today. He says: "Beware: heads of nations dominate, but among you it must not be thus. The greatest must serve the smallest. He who feels he is the greatest, must be the servant". We too must all be servants. It is true that in life there are problems: we argue among ourselves ... but this must be something that passes, a transient thing, because in our heart there must always be this love of serving the other, of being at the service of the other.

And may this gesture I will perform today be for us all a gesture that helps us to be better servants to each other, friends, brothers in service. With these sentiments, let us continue the celebration with the washing of the feet.
