



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS

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Special Circular

March, 2016/042.1

TO ALL PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS WORKING IN THE ARCHDIOCESE
OF LAGOS, AND THE LAY FAITHFUL

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

NEW DECREE ON THE WASHING OF FEET ON HOLY THURSDAY

I have found it necessary to send this circular in order to present the proper perspective on the matter of the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday. On the instruction of the Holy Father Pope Francis, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) issued on January 6 a Decree stating that all members of the people of God—including women—may have their feet washed during the evening liturgy of Holy Thursday. The Decree states 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 and that "such small groups can be made up of men and women."*

This Vatican decree that "all members of the people of God" **may** be chosen for the washing of the feet focuses on the significance of the washing of the feet rather than the priesthood and ordination. Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, confirmed this when he told journalists that although traditionally 12 men were selected to represent the 12 apostles, the meaning of the rite signifies Jesus' unconditional love and message on servant-leadership.

As with every change in the ritual or law of the Church, the new decree has generated some concerns and aroused questions in the minds of the faithful. Responding to these questions, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Robert Sarah, explains that the revised decree is **optional and not obligatory**. Speaking to reporters at the Vatican on the 26 of February, Cardinal Sarah advised priests to follow their

Conscience: *Every bishop or priest 'has to decide in accord with his own conscience, and according to the purpose for which the Lord instituted this feast.'*

In loving obedience and full accord with the Universal Church, I accept this change and encourage all our priests to do the same. However, before we fully implement it in our Archdiocese, it is necessary we take time to teach, catechize and bring our people up to speed on the meaning and significance of this rite, and its message of unconditional love.

After a prayerful reflection and taking into consideration our local circumstance and pastoral condition, I hereby instruct that **we maintain the status quo during the Holy Thursday Mass this year, 2016**. We shall be duly informed when to commence full implementation of the option of including women, children et al.

Let us keep in mind that the central focus of the Holy Thursday Liturgy is our Lord Jesus, His priesthood, and the Eucharist. It is my hope and prayer that, all Parish Priests and Priests-in-Charge, will, in their care of the people entrusted to them, engage in serious prayer and reflection in coming to the best way to explain this new decree to the people and exercise prudence in disseminating new changes from Pope Francis, particularly if such changes conflict with their personal preferences.

I wish you all a spirit-filled Holy Week.

(Signed)

+ Alfred Adewale Martins
Archbishop, Metropolitan See of Lagos.