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## Editorial

### We Are Brothers

Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of 12 immigrants during Holy Thursday celebrations, hoping to bring together different religions and cultures in a gesture that comes two days after the Brussels attacks stirred anti-Islam attitudes.

“All of us together: Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Copts, Evangelicals. But all brothers and children of the same God,” the pontiff said at a Mass at a migrant reception center that houses nearly 900 asylum-seekers in Castelnuovo di Porto, north of Rome. “We want to live together in peace.” He named the assault on the Belgium capital an “act of war, of destruction ... by people who do not want to live in peace.”

The highly symbolic Easter ritual of washing the feet commemorates the rite that Jesus practiced with his Apostles before his Crucifixion. Francis’ repeated inclusion of women — as well as non-Catholics — has prompted much debate.

This year, eight men and four women were involved in the foot-washing. Three were Muslim, three were Coptic Christian women from Eritrea and one was Hindu. “We have different cultures and religions, but we are brothers and we want to live in peace,” Francis said before washing and kissing the feet of the migrants, some of whom were moved to tears.

In the Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica, Francis sought to highlight the need for mercy, the theme of the 2016 Jubilee Year he

launched in December. "Mercy restores everything; it restores dignity to each person," he said.

Speaking directly to thousands of priests at the earlier Mass, Francis urged them to stay close to the poor and marginalized.

"As priests we identify with people who are excluded," he said. "We remind ourselves that there are countless masses of people who are poor, uneducated, prisoners, who find themselves in such situations because others oppress them."

Francis warned that priests "are often blind" to those who are suffering, sometimes "because of an excess of complicated theology" or "because of an excessive 'bubbly' spirituality, a 'light' spirituality."

"We feel ourselves also trapped, not so much by insurmountable stone walls or steel enclosures that affect many peoples, but rather by a digital, virtual worldliness that is opened and closed by a simple click," he said. "We are oppressed, not by threats and pressures, like so many poor people, but by the allure of a thousand commercial advertisements which we cannot shrug off."

The papal foot-washing ritual Thursday not only sent a signal of openness to refugees despite the violence, but also to women in the church. May we continue this journey of openness and compassion!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ  
Editor

Adapted from *USA Today*. See <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/03/24/we-brothers-pope-francis-washes-feet-migrants/82214856/>