

INTRODUCTION

HABEMUS PAPAM!

Pope Francis



Editor's Note

With the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI on February 11, 2013 and the election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio on March 13 as Pope Francis, this is a historic time for the Church. In a months time, we have experienced both the first papal resignation in 600 years and the first non-European elected to the papacy in 900 years. Vincentiana has asked for commentary from four confreres: G. Gregory Gay, Superior General; Éli Chaves dos Santos, Assistant Superior General from Brazil; Fabiano Spisla, President of CLAPVI and Visitor of Curitiba, Brazil; and Gustavo González of the Province of Argentina, who serves as provincial economo. This section concludes with an article on the invitation extended to the Superior General to attend Mass with the Holy Father. It first appeared in www.cmglobal.org

A Faithful and Faith-filled Shepherd

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

When Pope Francis was announced as our new Pope, I recall there was complete silence among those of us watching the television, because no one knew who he was. In the weeks prior to the conclave, the media was filled with predictions, profiles, and pictures of who the next pope might be, focusing on the Cardinals deemed to be "*Papabile*". For me, it was interesting to see that in all the frenzy of information and stories that raced across the media, never once was the name of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the present Pope Francis ever mentioned. No pictures of him shown or the like: a work of the Holy Spirit? Let's hope so... I believe so.

The most striking initial impression of this Pope for me is his simplicity and desire to be among people, including his brother bishops, priests, religious, pastoral agents, his people, and especially the poor. He does not stand much on protocol, which can tend to distance our leaders from us. This attitude may be alarming for some Vatican officials and hierarchy. Yet, I believe we are witnessing something that people had hoped for: a Holy Father whose demeanor combines the spirit and way of both Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. In the October 2012 Synod of Bishops in which I was a participant, a number of bishops and other participants spoke both in small groups and plenary sessions of the need for greater simplicity in the way the hierarchy presents itself to the public. That sentiment was constant theme in the Synod.

A bishop from the Philippines called on his brother bishops to exhibit greater simplicity in lifestyle and to be present to people as their pastors, not their princes. This is what many of the Catholic faithful want, except for those caught up in the 'pomp and circumstance' fanfare, which can create an impression of distance and superiority. This can lead to an external focus as a way of demonstrating the 'glory of God'. Yet, in my opinion, it distracts us from the glory of God found in the dignity of all God's people, especially the poor. I found most striking (as did many other people) that Pope Francis' first action was a humble request to all in St. Peter's Square and throughout the world to bless and pray for him before he would give his blessing. For me, that was a powerful symbol: asking God's people bless him in his leadership role as Universal Pastor of our Church. I have high hopes our Pope will be one for the people, especially for the poor.

I also find two other facts about the new Pope Francis to be quite significant: he is the first non-European Pope in nearly one thousand years, and one who comes from Latin America. This is especially noteworthy to me, as I believe that the Church in Latin America has attempted with great determination to inculcate the work of the Second Vatican Council into Church teaching as well as the everyday life of the people. This is most fitting, coming in the "Year of Faith" when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of the Council. Through the leadership of Bishops' Conferences, the Latin American Church is unique in how it has integrated the documents of Vatican II into the life of the Church. Starting in 1968 and continuing, the Bishops' Conference met in Medellin, Colombia, Puebla, Mexico, Santo Domingo, and most recently, Aparecida, Brazil. In each of these settings, the Bishops of Latin America called people to integrate the teachings of Vatican II into their daily lives. They challenged them to embrace the new evangelization by accepting their faith as a permanent state of mission, recommitting their desire to live their baptismal promises to Christ and his Church.

This commitment actively involves both hierarchy and laity on a continual journey, as the Bishops of Latin America have demonstrated both in their documents and pastoral activity. I'm very delighted that we have a Pope who reflects this love of Vatican II, and is calling all of us as the People of God to participate more fully in the life of the Church, and actively seeks to express a preferential option for the poor. Needless to say, our Holy Father's lifestyle, words, and actions are not only a herald of hope to the Church and the world; they reflect quite well something else near and dear to my heart and yours: our Vincentian Charism. May God bless and strengthen Pope Francis in his new ministry as Chief Shepherd of God's flock.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

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