



Pope Francis greets Fr. Gregory Gay after Mass in Casa Santa Marta on April 16

“Submit to the Holy Spirit... and go forward”: Superior General Joins Pope Francis for Mass

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The message was sudden and startling. “Sr. Marie Claire asks that you call Sr. Claudia at the Casa Santa Marta immediately”, it read. Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, had just returned from Bolivia after a long and exhausting two week trip, and he was anxious for some much-needed rest. But the message was followed by a call with a simple, straightforward message: “The Holy Father is expecting you for Mass tomorrow at 7:00 am”. So a good night’s rest would wait until later!

Early the next morning, on Tuesday April 16, the Superior General made his way to the Vatican and was admitted through the gates to Casa Santa Marta, the Vatican’s official “guest house”, most recently famous as a residence for cardinals who took part in the recent papal conclave. It is now the new home of Pope Francis. Sr. Claudia, the

Sister Servant of the eight Daughters of Charity who staff the Casa, had procured an invitation for the Superior General at Mass. Fr. Gregory vested and took his place among several bishops and two Franciscan priests.

As it turned out, Mass that day was quite noteworthy. Pope Francis' homily, which surprised and delighted Fr. Gregory, was widely reported in the media, beginning with the Vatican Press Office. It was a weekday mass in Easter season with a reading from the Acts of the Apostles on the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The Holy Father used the story to reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit and our resistance in listening to the Spirit. Specifically, Pope Francis said, "The Holy Spirit upsets us because it moves us, makes us walk, and pushes the Church forward. Because of this, we wish to calm down the Holy Spirit, to tame it, and this is wrong. The Holy Spirit is the strength of God; it's what gives us strength to go forward. Nowadays, everyone seems happy about the presence of the Holy Spirit, but that's not really the case, and there still is a temptation to resist it".

Pope Francis cited the controversy over the effects of the Second Vatican Council as evidence of this resistance to the Holy Spirit. He described Vatican II as "a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit". But a half century later, the Pope asked, "Have we done everything the Holy Spirit was asking us to do? No. We celebrate an anniversary, we put up a monument... but we don't want to change, and what's more, there are those who want to turn the clock back".

Fr. Gregory said he found the Holy Father's homily refreshing and empowering, and that Pope Francis had spoken "like the true pastor he is, one with his people and the Church. It was very consistent with what I've experienced with the hierarchy of the Church in Latin America". Fr. Gregory noted that in his years as a missionary in the Republic of Panama and as the Visitor of the Province of Central America, "the Church is alive and vibrant in these countries because their leadership has discerned the workings of the Holy Spirit among the faithful. As a result, the evolution of lay ministry and the development of a 'preferential option for the poor' were championed by the Bishops of Latin American at regional meetings, starting in 1968 in Medellin and up to the present day". So the words of the Holy Father were not only familiar and pleasing to the Superior General, but they echoed a theme consonant to his life and missionary ministry in Panama and Central America.

As can be seen in the above photo, after Mass, Fr. Gregory had an opportunity to meet and speak briefly with the Holy Father. He told Pope Francis that he appreciated his homily. He also mentioned that Bishop Vincente Bokalic, who served as the Visitor of the Province of Argentina before being named the new auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires

had expressed to him great gratitude at being able to live and serve among the poor as a bishop. Pope Francis smiled and said to Fr. Gregory, "You're both quite welcome".

As he strives to lead the Congregation of the mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the world wide Vincentian Family, Fr. Gregory noted that as he reads and reflects on the talks of Pope Francis, he believes the new Holy Father has "a truly Vincentian heart that loves the poor, and like St. Vincent, a willingness to seek Divine Providence by following the path set forth by the Holy Spirit". He concluded his recollection of this event by quoting the final thought of Pope Francis' homily at the Mass he attended on April 16: "*Submit to the Holy Spirit, which comes from within and makes us go forward along the path of holiness*".



N.B.: Quotes of Pope Francis at the April 16 Mass in this article were taken from the Vatican web site: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-2nd-vatican-council-work-of-holy-spirit-but-s>



Fr. G. Gregory Gay at Mass with the Holy Father on April 16.
He is third from the left