

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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ALLELUIA HE IS RISEN! Habemus Papam!

It is no mistake that we start this Glorious Easter Season with a new Pope. New life, new joy and a certain hope in life rather than death should enable us to not only to 'hope' but to share this good news with others. But is the election of a new Holy Father a joyful event or does it pass us by with only a minor interest and little reflection on what event has just happened and its crucial importance for us and the Universal Church? All new leaders make promises to their followers and often ones that cannot be fully realised. Yet here we have not promises but a call to service and a fatherly affection of a Shepherd, one who is called to lead by service as indeed we all are. The power of the Chief Shepherd is to call the faithful followers of Jesus to greater Holiness and self-giving and not power and control, one people against another. How little the world understands this unique role that the Popes exercise trying to fit the temporal power into their own mode of understanding.

The Petrine office, that is, the office given to St Peter, the rock, has withstood many assaults. History reveals the many difficult paths that the successors have had to follow and some failed to live up to their office in the purest sense but yet the Ministry has survived and has in recent times given us Holy and dedicated men who truly wear the Pallium.

There have been 265 popes including St Peter and Pope Francis 1, the first by this name is the 266th. This alone should make us respectful of the tradition of those sent to lead God's people and it is this succession that maintains the authenticity and continuity of the Message of the Gospel.

Now what is the Pallium, (cloak/mantle)? The Holy Father receives a piece of wool, woven into a cloth with black/red crosses and held together with pins representing the three nails used for the crucifixion.

The woven pure lamb's wool garment is a sign of the office of The Good Shepherd and can be traced back to the 2nd century. The crosses are a sign of the suffering of Jesus and his death so reminding us and the Pope that the journey ends with martyrdom either actual or in dying to self.

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The Fisherman's ring which the Pope receives also tells us that he has to be the fisher of men as Jesus told St Peter to be. None of these symbols are about earthly power but the following of the Gospels as Jesus told St Peter and the Apostles to do.

So the Pope is a Shepherd and a Gatherer of all mankind under the mantle of Jesus Christ. What an awesome responsibility this is to fall on Human shoulders. A Priest and Bishop, he already carries responsibility for the flock under his care. He is of course the Bishop of Rome as his first word indicated to those gathered around St Peter's on the night of his election. (13.3.13) he already has the crook and staff. But now elected by his fellow Cardinal Bishops as their spokesman and guide of the whole church he now speaks on matters of faith and morals to the whole Christian Community.

The Holy Spirit guides the church and is truly present through the actions of those whose awesome duty it is to elect the Pope. If we truly believe this and do not get side-tracked into the many diverse opinions on various issues that abound in the people of God then surely we must behave humbly before the man who has been chosen to lead the church through these difficult times. Humility helps us to recognise who we are before God and those who have authority over us. When this authority is empowered by God there is not much room for dissent. We may struggle with some things or even disagree in our humanity but we should always remember that the Pope's principal authority is to guide souls not assert temporal power.

Now the Chief Shepherd has laid out what he considers is The Mission with which he hopes to guide the Church. There is no apology therefore in including his inaugural Homily overleaf. Maybe we could read it and reflect on it and Pray daily for Pope Francis and that our response will be faith-filled and obedient to the call of the Gospel.

H.H.



Pope Francis 1 chose to have a recycled ring!
Please note Homily slightly shortened.

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Inaugural Homily of Pope Francis I, 13.3.13

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank the Lord that I can celebrate this Holy Mass for the inauguration of my Petrine ministry on the solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Virgin Mary and the patron of the universal Church. It is a significant coincidence, and it is also the name-day of my Ven. predecessor: we are close to him with our prayers, full of affection and gratitude. In the Gospel we heard that “Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife” (Mt 1:24). These words already point to the mission which God entrusts to Joseph: he is to be the *custos*, the protector. The *protector* of whom?

Of Mary and Jesus; but this protection is then extended to the Church, as Blessed John Paul II pointed out: “Just as Saint Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ’s upbringing, he likewise watches over and protects Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model”

How does Joseph exercise his role as protector?

Discreetly, humbly and silently, but with an unflinching presence and utter fidelity, even when he finds it hard to understand. From the time of his betrothal to Mary until the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem, he is there at every moment with loving care. As the spouse of Mary, he is at her side in good times and bad.

How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church? By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God’s presence and receptive to God’s plans, and not simply to his own. . . Joseph is a “protector” because he is able to hear God’s voice and be guided by his will; and for this reason he is all the more sensitive to the persons entrusted to his safekeeping! The vocation of being a “protector”, however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. . . It means caring for one another in our families: husbands and wives first protect one another, and then, as parents, they care for their children, and children themselves, in time, protect their parents. It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection

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and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts!

Whenever human beings fail to live up to this responsibility, whenever we fail to care for creation and for our brothers and sisters, the way is opened to destruction and hearts are hardened.

Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be “protectors” of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world! Here I would add one more thing: caring, protecting, demands goodness, it calls for a certain tenderness. In the Gospels, Saint Joseph appears as a strong and courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love. We must not be afraid of goodness, or tenderness!

Today, together with the feast of Saint Joseph, we are celebrating the beginning of the ministry of the new Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, which also involves a certain power.

Certainly, Jesus Christ conferred power upon Peter, but what sort of power was it? Jesus’ three questions to Peter about love are followed by three commands: feed my lambs, feed my sheep.

Let us never forget that authentic power is service, and that the Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the Cross. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison.

Only those who serve with love are able to protect!

In the second reading, Saint Paul speaks of Abraham, who, “hoping against hope, believed” Hoping against hope! Today too, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others. To protect Jesus with Mary, to protect the whole of creation, to protect each person, especially the poorest, to protect ourselves: this is a service that the Bishop of Rome is called to carry out, yet one to which all of us are called, so that the star of hope will shine brightly. Let us protect with love all that God has given us!

I implore the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, Saints Peter and Paul, and Saint Francis, that the Holy Spirit may accompany my ministry, and I **ask all of you to pray for me! Amen.**