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Pope Francis' style change found in way he greets cardinals

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NCR Today

Pope Francis

Vatican City — Changes in style between Pope Francis and his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, were highlighted Friday as the new pontiff greeted the entire College of Cardinals for the first time.

Although speaking with prepared remarks, Francis frequently put the papers aside and added off-the-cuff comments as he gestured widely and looked at the cardinals in the audience.

After thanking Cardinals Angelo Sodano, Tarcisio Bertone and Giovanni Battista Re by name for their roles in handling church governance in the time between the popes, Francis then said he and many among the group "are in the third stage of our lives."

"We are in our old age, but it is the time of giving," Francis said.

"Old age is the seat of life's wisdom. People who are wise go a long way, like old Simeon in the temple, who met Jesus," he said.

"We need to hand on this wisdom to young people. Wisdom is like good wine that matures with age. A German poet said about old age: 'Old age is a time of peace and prayer.' We need to hand on this wisdom to the young," he said.

Crossing himself before giving an apostolic blessing, Francis then greeted the cardinals one by one, seemingly without a time limit for each.

Standing at the center of the ornate Clementine Hall, Francis greeted most of the cardinals with the traditional European double-kiss on the cheeks. Several times he made a writing gesture, perhaps indicating the cardinals should leave a note about the meeting or provide their email address.

One cardinal gave the pope a yellow bracelet, and Francis smiled and immediately put it on his right wrist. When another cardinal bent to kiss his ring, Francis bent too and kissed the cardinal's ring at the same time.

He left the center of the aisle briefly to walk toward one cardinal, who was walking slowly and bent over with a cane. Reaching the prelate, Francis made the sign of the cross on the cardinal's forehead with his thumb, perhaps praying for healing.

Friday's meeting was the first for Francis with the entire College of Cardinals, which was responsible for the governance of the church during the *sede vacante* period following Benedict's resignation Feb. 28.

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Sodano is dean of the College of Cardinals and was responsible for organizing the 10 meetings of cardinals after Benedict's resignation. Bertone was Benedict's Secretary of State and is the church's camerlengo, the Vatican's acting head of state during the interregnum period.

Re, the senior cardinal-bishop among the cardinals, chaired the conclave that elected Francis because Sodano is 85 and could not attend, as he is above the voting age of 80.

Francis had Mass Thursday with the 115 cardinals under 80 who elected him, focusing his homily on a meditation on the meaning of the cross.

"When we profess a Christ without the cross ... we aren't disciples of the Lord," Francis said then. "We are worldly, we are bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, but not disciples of the Lord."

Francis' next scheduled public appearance is an audience with journalists Saturday morning.

Ending his greeting to the cardinals Friday, Pope Francis entrusted his ministry to the protection of Mary.

"One day, we will contemplate the face of the risen Christ through the intercession of Mary, the mother of the church," he said. "I entrust my ministry, and your ministry, to her maternal protection. We all listen to the voice of her son, persevering together in prayer and witnessing to the presence of the Lord."

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