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Pope Francis: 'I would love a church that is poor'

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 16, 2013 The Francis Chronicles
Pope Francis
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On his election to the papacy, Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio chose to name himself after Francis of Assisi because the 12th-century saint "is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation," Pope Francis said Saturday.

"How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor," he told about 5,000 journalists gathered for an audience with the pope.

Recalling the moment when the cardinals were counting the votes of the secret election to elect the pope, Francis said he was sitting next to Cardinal Claudio Hummes, Archbishop Emeritus of Sao Paolo, Brazil, "when things were looking dangerous."

When the votes in Bergoglio's favor reached 77 votes -- the two-thirds majority of the 115 cardinals required to attain the papacy -- Hummes, Francis said, "embraced me and kissed me and said: 'Don't forget the poor.' "

"And those words came to me: the poor, the poor," Francis said, pointing at his head. "Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted."

"Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, don't we?" the pope asked.

Francis of Assisi "gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man who wanted a poor church," the pope said. "How I would love a church that is poor and for the poor."

Francis' remarks on his choice of papal name came as he departed for almost five minutes from the text he had prepared for the occasion, saying he understood there had been some confusion over whether he meant to honor St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis De Sales, or St. Francis of Assisi with the name.

Laughing several times as he spoke, Francis at one point folded the prepared texts and placed them on his lap so he could gesture widely.

Francis also joked that some had suggested he take the name Pope Adrian after 15th-century Pope Adrian VI, who was known as a Vatican reformer.

Others, Pope Francis joked, had suggested he call himself Clement XV in order to rebuke Pope Clement XIV, an 18th-century pope who suppressed the Society of Jesus, Bergoglio's religious order, in 1773.

Francis is the first pope elected from the Jesuits. Pope Pius VII reversed the suppression, which was largely seen

as political and not theological, in 1814.

Francis had begun the address by addressing the journalists as "dear friends" and by thanking them for their work covering the conclave that led to his election.

He said he understood it could be difficult sometimes to communicate what the church was doing -- for example, in the way it elects a pope -- because the church "does not respond to an earthly logic" and "the nature of the church is spiritual, not political."

"Christ", Francis continued, "is the center, not the successor of Peter."

"Christ is the reference point at the heart of the church; without him, Peter and the church would not exist."

The Holy Spirit, Francis said, inspired the events of the past days.

"It was he who inspired the decision of Benedict XVI for the good of the church," Francis said. "It was he who inspired the choice of the cardinals."

The pope also said journalists' work "calls for careful preparation, sensitivity and experience, like so many other professions."

"But it also demands a particular concern for what is true, good and beautiful," Francis continued.

"This is something which we have in common, since the church exists to communicate precisely this: truth, goodness and beauty," he said. "It should be apparent that all of us are called not to communicate ourselves, but this existential triad made up of truth, beauty and goodness."

The new pope concluded the audience with the journalists by offering his apostolic blessing in silence.

"Not everyone present belongs to the Catholic faith and others do not believe," the pope said.

"I respect the conscience of each one of you," he continued, "knowing that each one of you is a child of God. May God bless you."

Pope Francis' next scheduled public appearance is for the traditional Angelus prayer Sunday, which he will give from the papal apartment though he does not yet live there.

The new pope will be installed formally during a Mass on Tuesday in St. Peter's Square. Dignitaries from around the world are expected to attend, including U.S. Vice President Joe Biden.

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. Follow him from the Vatican on Twitter at **twitter.com/joshjmac** [1] .]

See below for video from Catholic News Service of the pope's remarks Saturday.

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