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Jesuit head: Pope a 'brother among brothers'

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 7, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Members of Pope Francis' religious order, the Jesuits, were "deeply touched" by a special Mass celebrated for them by the pope July 31 and see the pontiff as a "brother among brothers," the global head of the order says in a special letter marking the occasion.

The Mass, which was held on the feast day of the Jesuits' founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola, was "an accumulation of contrasts," writes Jesuit Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, the order's superior general, in a letter obtained by *NCR*.

Although reports at the time of the pope's celebration of the Mass included poignant accounts of Francis' homily for he occasion and how the pontiff took time to pray at St. Ignatius' tomb, Nicolás' letter may indicate just how much the leaders of the pope's order feel he aligns with their worldview.

"The truth is that everything was so simple and natural that it is hard to say anything," states Nicolás in the letter, distributed July 31 to the more than 17,000 Jesuits worldwide. "In a way, there has been a certain 'accumulation of contrasts.'"

"The first point of contrast comes from our high expectations since this was the first time in history that a Jesuit Pope presided at one of our Eucharistic celebrations," Nicolás continues. "The simple reality of a gathering of brothers, 'friends in the Lord,' evoked this feeling of contrast because of the naturalness of closeness and brotherhood."

Nicolás also names four "surprising moments that have deeply touched our hearts." Among them:

- "The simplicity of the encounter, from beginning to end: A brother among brothers;"
- "The opportunity to experience how Francis celebrates Eucharist, without liturgical flourish. On the contrary, he has a heartfelt and meditative style, like one who is in contact with mystery, a style that we Jesuits are used to."

Pope Francis celebrated the Mass July 31 with some 200 of his Jesuit confreres at Rome's Church of the Gesu, where St. Ignatius is buried. Ignatius, a 16th-century Spaniard, founded the Jesuits in 1541. His feast is celebrated on the day he died in 1556.

While at the church July 31, the pope also prayed before a relic of St. Francis Xavier and at the tomb of Father Pedro Arrupe, superior of the Jesuits from 1965 to 1983.

Nicolás mentions that the pope also "spent a moment" at the church's Chapel of Our Lady of the Way, which contains an image of the Madonna Della Strada, an image of the virgin Mary who is considered the patroness of the order.

"Making the words of Saint Ignatius our own, we ask Our Lady to place us with her Son, so that we may more deeply enter the spirituality that unites us all in order to be always disposed 'to love and to serve,'" Nicolás

writes. "This is what I desire most for the Society at this moment."

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Following is Jesuit Fr. Adolfo Nicolás' full letter.

Jesuit Fr. Adolfo Nicolas' letter about Pope Francis' Mass with the Jesuits [2] by joshua_mac8430 [3]

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