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Funeral for transgendered person at pope's church

John L. Allen Jr. | Dec. 27, 2013 NCR Today
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If anyone wants an example of what the emphasis on mercy under Pope Francis looks like in action, they'll find one this afternoon in Rome at the Church of the Gesù, the mother church of the pope's Jesuit order, where a funeral will be celebrated for a Colombian transgendered and homeless person beaten to death five months ago.

The body of Andrea Quintero, who struggled with drug addiction and lived on the streets in the area around Rome's main Termini train station, was found alongside a track in the station on July 29. An investigation concluded she died as a result of injuries from a severe beating.

Quintero, 28 at the time, had left her family in Colombia four years before. She was well known to personnel at the station and to charity workers, calling herself the "Trans of Termini."

A week before her death, she gave a brief video interview to the Italian paper *Corriere della Sera* in which she described having a paralyzed arm and walking with a limp as a result of a previous beating.

In the interview, Quintero said her dream was to "meet a guy with money who'll get me out of this ugly life," referring to drugs and homelessness. To date, police have not arrested anyone for Quintero's murder.

The delay in organizing a funeral, according to news reports, was due to the fact that Quintero's family never made a request for her remains or provided any instructions about how they wanted her memorialized.

Eventually the Jesuit-run Centro Astalli, dedicated to aiding refugees, in combination with the local branch of Caritas and civic officials, stepped in to organize a funeral service.

Among other dignitaries expected to be on hand is Cécile Kyenge, a Congo-born politician and ophthalmologist who serves as Italy's Minister for Integration, making her the first person of color to serve in an Italian cabinet.

Jesuit Fr. Giovanni La Manna, director of the Centro Astalli, said the funeral is intended not only to mourn Quintero's death, but to offer "a signal for the entire Roman community that's distracted in the face so many people who face discrimination, and who live their difficulties to the indifference of our city."

In a tweet about the funeral, the Vatican writer for *Corriere della Sera*, Gian Guido Vecchi, referred to it taking place in "the church of Francis," presumably a reference to the fact that it's happening at the mother church of his Jesuit order.

More broadly, however, the funeral expresses the "Church of Francis" in the sense that it's a classic gesture of mercy for someone who lived and died at society's margins.

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