

E-BULLETIN #59

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

item 112

my encounter with Pope Francis

Just as the international meeting of Pallottine Brothers in Konstancin, Poland was concluding on 13th March 2013 Fr Jozef Lasak, Provincial Rector of Christ the King Province, shouted from the back row: "white smoke"! We hurriedly concluded the meeting and rushed to the community room to have a glimpse of the new Holy Father.

It was the Cardinal of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio sj, now Pope Francis.



My first sight of the new Holy Father brought back memories of an encounter with him in May 2011. During Visitation to our Argentina Region, I made an appointment with then Cardinal Jorge to discuss the Cause of our 5 Pallottine Argentinean martyrs. I was seated in a room with big, comfortable chairs. All of a sudden the door opened and the Cardinal came and sat before me on a very simple chair. He spoke to me with great friendliness, and in a very low voice. He was a great listener. He spoke highly of the Pallottine martyrs and

supported their Cause. At the conclusion he accompanied me through to the front door of his house and said goodbye in the most cordial way – a first for me with such a distinguished Cardinal.

This encounter really touched me. He was so humble and human. There was no show of grandiosity or formality. Just a humble pastor and human being. I often cited the example of this Cardinal, and my encounter with him, in talks and homilies during many Visitations to different parts of the world. Happily we now have a Holy Father who knows the Pallottines very well, and has interacted closely with our confreres working in his Archdiocese.

During the present Conclave I quietly asked God for a Holy Father who was a Pastor with some missionary background, for someone who has had first-hand experience of the joys and struggles of ordinary people. It is one thing to produce documents and books from the comfort of one's room; it is a totally different thing to encounter human beings who have to continuously struggle

for their daily bread, fight against injustice and work hard to survive. In those situations faith in God is not a luxury, nor is one pestered with endless questions which are creations of our rational minds. Just as in the *Our Father*, the prayer of people struggling, spiritually or materially, becomes an expression of the existential longing in their hearts and breathes out a living trust in the providence of God.

It is for this reason that missions are so important for us. People are crying aloud for God, for the Good News and even for their daily bread. We need to reach out to them in the name of Jesus. We can find a hundred excuses for not doing so but then we fail in our basic Christian commitment. The choice of the present Pope is a confirmation of this truth. Even as a Cardinal, he cooked his own food and travelled by buses and trains during pastoral visits to parishes. He never used his car or lived in a palace. He was a frequent visitor to the slums of Buenos Aires. He was a Pastor, down to earth and closely in touch with people of all walks of life.

By assuming the name of Francis he has also chosen the values that St Francis lived for - poverty, simplicity, humility and closeness to God's creation. He has been called to renew and rebuild the Church once again, like the great Italian saint himself, by returning to the spirit of the Gospel. Authenticity of Christian life will depend ultimately on our imitation of the life of Jesus, as we discover it in the Gospels. That is why our holy Founder had the divine inspiration to challenge all of us by placing the Gospel as the only rule for our lives and apostolate.

This is also the only means – and end – of New Evangelization.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the Church as always. All that is required of us is to allow ourselves to be guided by that Spirit. The life, testimony and teachings of our new Pastor, Pope Francis, will be very much in line with the prophetic vision of our Founder, to revive faith and rekindle charity. In him we will discover once again the Jesus of the Gospel.

The entire Pallottine Family rejoices together with the Universal Church at the election of Pope Francis. It assures him our prayerful support in his Petrine ministry.

May God be praised for the gift of this new Supreme Pastor to the Church.

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