



Acies Allocutio



Presentata Curia
Saturday 23rd March 2013

My dear fellow Legionaries,

From what we gather Pope Francis regularly attended an Acies ceremony and offered his allegiance to Our Lady. Indeed I was struck how the morning after his inauguration he went across to a shrine of Our Lady in St. Mary Majors and prayed there before the Madonna. After the final blessing of his inauguration Mass he went across to a figure of Our Lady and prayed before it. Clearly there is a special place in his life for Our Lady. And I believe she will play a big part in his pontificate, something we must keep an eye to because the media may miss this aspect of him.

I do not know what to make of the fact that in the service of Our Lady, helping out the Legion of Mary and attempting to put in place as good a practice as I can for the Cause of Frank Duff I ended up landing in Rome as Pope Benedict announced his resignation on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and have just comeback after the inauguration of Pope Francis. It caused suspicion in some quarters that I knew something, it caused jealousy in other places and certainly spawned a bit of laughter as jokes of all sorts went around the place. My housemate tells me half seriously that some wondered if I would ever be back and even thought of selling my furniture off!

Yes it might be just coincidence but I am inclined to think that for some reason, as others too have wondered, if the hand of Our Lady is not in it somewhere. I would like to think that it has something to do with Frank's cause, maybe a sign of encouragement, not least with the new Pope choosing the name that Frank carries.

Like everyone around the world I was watching everything going on in the media. They were doing their own prognosis on the Church and identifying the qualities in the Pope-to-be. I had only the slight advantage of seeing our own Cardinal, Sean Brady. I respected the confidentiality and put no pressure on him by asking questions but kept an eye on his face and body language. But he said something very significant on the morning of the conclave to us all, a way of looking at it that had appeared in no newspaper nor on any blog. He said that the Cardinals were trying to find out which among them, like St. Peter, loved Jesus more than the others. "Do you love me more than these others do?" Yes, Lord you know that I love you! What a criterion! That had appeared in no blog or commentary that I had seen. That might be a good meditation for any of us. "Do I love Jesus more than the others? And if not what must I change so that this becomes a reality in my life?"

The next evening, the Wednesday, after my classes to help me assist with the cause of Frank Duff, I came down to the Square to find it packed with people and umbrellas.



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Speaking with one US Cardinal later he said that while the 115 Cardinals were locked up and on their own they knew that they were not really on their own but were supported by the prayers of millions all over the earth. And I was struck by the size of the number of people standing in the torrential rain praying too.

From the time I was a child I was told of this smoke. I had seen the photos and the past television pictures. It is hard to describe the feelings when you're there to see it live. I had seen it black that morning and went home to lunch happy that I had seen black smoke. But to see the white smoke with my own eyes and no ambiguity about its colour and to know we had a Pope was special. I knew I was present at a special moment of history. And I knew that when he got us to pray and go into silence?and what a silence?that he was someone special.

The morning after the election I looked on the web at what the various newspapers said. On the whole it was so positive: at last a good news story for the Church! But then I looked into the Guardian and found it already raking up the muck. For a while the muck was being thrown but the thought occurred to me that this must be the devil roaring and I became more convinced that the right choice had been made. And as you know a senior judge from Argentina has confirmed that there is no case for the Pope to answer.

But I thought to myself, "You know even if it were true what they said, even if as a young Jesuit he had allowed two priests be taken prisoner or whatever it was he was supposed to have done, it would still not disqualify him. Think of the first St. Peter. He was not confronted by a gruff policeman, nor by a young soldier prodding a machine gun into his ribs. A mere servant girl said to him, and we have no evidence that it was said aggressively, 'You are one of his disciples!'" And Peter buckled under that pressure. Peter speaks of all our weakness.

Now let me just go forward a few hours to the moment when Our Lady and St John have left behind Jesus' body in the tomb and are going back. What is going on in Mary's heart? Must she not have thought at one stage, if not in these words at least in something like them anyway, "Jesus gave me this man John to be my son. He is a good son. He stood by me. But where were the others. Where was Peter? What a leader he has turned out to be!" If she was human at all must she not have been tempted to have bad feelings about Peter and the others who had betrayed her son so badly?

But yet I want you to notice this, and it is a lesson to all of us who may feel bad about a person who has done us wrong and let us down, that not long afterwards Our lady is in among these traitors of her son and praying with them and asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen them in witnessing to her Son. And her prayers were mighty. Look at what the Holy Spirit did for Peter on Pentecost Sunday and in the following years. He proclaimed Jesus with great effect and suffered for him and worked mighty miracles. So great was he



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that people wanted to even touch his clothes. From traitor to brave warrior. It should be a story to give us all confidence in the face of our own human weakness.

How wise indeed of Pope Francis to go straight to this powerful Lady and seek her help as he too began the ministry of Peter. You and I may be very conscious of our weaknesses and our failures to stand for Our Lord. But let us turn to Mary and again ask her powerful intercession that we may be given the great help of the Holy Spirit like the disciples at Pentecost and let us not be afraid to witness to her Son, simply and without affectation, like Pope Francis.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill