

# **‘Mega Salaries Are Evil,’ Caused by ‘Cursed Hunger for Gold,’ Says Vatican Preacher**

The Vatican’s official preacher, at a Good Friday service attended by Pope Francis, said huge salaries and the world financial crisis were modern evils caused by the “cursed hunger for gold.”

The pope presided at a “Passion of the Lord” service in St. Peter’s Basilica, the first of two papal events on the day Christians around the world commemorate Jesus’ death by crucifixion.

The long service is one of the few times during the year that the pope listens while someone else preaches.

Father Raniero Cantalamessa, whose title is “preacher of pontifical household,” weaved his sermon around the character of Judas Iscariot, who the Bible says betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

“Behind every evil in our society is money, or at least in part,” Cantalamessa said at the solemn service that included chanting by priests recounting the last hours of Jesus’ life.

“The financial crisis that the world has gone through and that this country [Italy] is still going through—is it not in large part due to the cursed hunger for gold?” he said.

“Is it not also a scandal that some people earn salaries and collect pensions that are sometimes 100 times higher than those of the people who work for them and that they raise their voices to object when a proposal is put forward to reduce their salary for the sake of greater social justice?” he said.

Francis, who has made caring for the poor a central theme of his pontificate, said in December that huge salaries and bonuses were symptoms of an economy based on greed and inequality.

In Italy, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's government has put a 240,000 euro (\$332,100) cap on salaries at state companies.

Later on Friday, the second of four packed days of papal activities culminating on Easter Sunday, Francis was due to lead a candlelight "Way of the Cross" procession around the ruins of Rome's Colosseum.

On Saturday, the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholic celebrates an Easter Eve service in St. Peter's Basilica and on Sunday he delivers his twice yearly "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) blessing and message.

On Sunday, Francis will canonize Pope John Paul II, who reigned from 1978 to 2005, and Pope John XXIII, who was pontiff from 1958 to 1963 and called the Second Vatican Council, a landmark meeting that modernized the Church.

Hundreds of thousands of people are due to come to Rome for the canonizations, the first time two popes are to be made saints at the same time and the first canonization of a pope since 1954.

(\$1 = Euros)

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*Editing by Robin Pomeroy*

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