

New Pope Cites Grandma's Folk Wisdom at His First Palm Sunday

The new pope began Holy Week on Sunday with a sermon invoking the folk wisdom of his grandmother, further emphasizing a new-look papacy that aims to be closer to the people.

Leading his first major service since his election, Pope Francis addressed a vast crowd gathered for Palm Sunday with simple language, urging them to shun corruption and greed and reach out to "the humble, the poor, the forgotten."

Departing from his prepared text and referring to wealth, he said: "You can't take it with you, my grandmother used to say."

Since his election on March 13, the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina has broken with the more esoteric and, some would say, ostentatious style of his predecessor Benedict, saying he wants to move the Church closer to the poor and suffering.

"Let us look around: how many wounds are inflicted upon humanity by evil! Wars, violence, economic conflicts that hit the weakest, greed for money, power, corruption, divisions, crimes against human life and against creation," he said.

Francis has decided to hold Holy Thursday service this week in a juvenile jail on Rome's outskirts rather than in the Vatican or in a Rome Basilica, where it has been held by all his predecessor in living memory.

He has also invited simple workers, such as the Vatican gardeners and street cleaners, to attend his morning Masses in the Vatican hotel where is still living ahead of moving into

the papal apartments in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace.

The service before some 250,000 people waving palm and olive branches in St. Peter's Square gave the new pope another opportunity to stress that he wants a Catholic Church that has been riven by scandal to be more austere and just.

Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem five days before he died. At the end of the service, Francis was driven around the square several times in an open jeep so he could be seen by more people in the huge throng, which overflowed and stretched for blocks down to the River Tiber.

The Church today, he said, like Jesus 2,000 years ago, wanted to transmit a message of hope, "especially in the hearts of the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten, those who do not matter in the eyes of the world".

After blessing palm and olive branches—both symbols of peace—Francis, wearing red and white vestments, walked to the altar on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica to conduct the outdoor Mass.

He again urged defense of the environment, speaking of "our personal sins: our failures in love and respect towards God, towards our neighbor and towards the whole of creation".

Brazil Trip

Francis confirmed that he will go to Rio de Janeiro at the end of the July to take part in the Church's World Day of Youth, a gathering of Catholic young people that takes place in a different city every two years.

The new pope has inherited a Church riven by problems that include sexual abuse scandals in many countries and allegations of corruption in the central Vatican bureaucracy.

Many people have expressed a wish that Francis could give the Church and the Vatican a better image.

"We are very happy. We are praying and hoping for good things from the pope and from the Church," said Alessandra Paillalef, a fellow Argentine who came to Rome to see her countryman lead Holy Week celebrations, which end on Easter Sunday, next week.

On Saturday afternoon Francis flew by helicopter to the papal summer residence south of Rome at Castel Gandolfo, where his predecessor, now called "Pope Emeritus Benedict" has been living since he abdicated on Feb. 28.

It was the first time in at least 600 years that a reigning pope and a former pope faced each other.

While the Vatican did not disclose what they discussed, it was likely that the conversation included problems of Vatican administration.

Before he resigned, Benedict left a secret report for Francis on the so-called "Vatileaks" scandal in which sensitive papal documents were stolen from the pope's desk and leaked to the media by his butler, Paolo Gabriele.

Last year Gabriele was arrested and sentenced by a Vatican court to 18 months in prison but Benedict pardoned him and he was freed last Christmas.

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