

**Homily for the Mass in Thanksgiving for the Election of Pope Francis
March 14, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today the Lord Jesus describes Saint John the Baptist as “a burning and shining lamp” (John 5:35). The Baptist had the mission the task of revealing the Messiah to Israel (cf. John 1:31). To accomplish this task of lighting the way before the Lord, John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Though the people at first rejoiced in John’s light, in time they preferred the darkness and came to rejoice not in John’s light but in his death. His testimony to the truth they would not accept, preferring instead deceits and half-truths. And just as they rejected John, so did they reject the true light of the world, Jesus Christ, (cf. John 1:9, 5:40).

Following the election of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, this focus on the life of the Forerunner of the Lord fittingly sheds its own light on the mission of the Holy Father, regardless of who he may be. The Supreme Pastor of the

Church shares in the mission of the Baptist to “prepare the way of the Lord” by lighting the path on which he will come (Luke 3:4).

When Pope Francis appeared on the central loggia of the Basilica of St. Peter yesterday in Rome, he said to us, “I ask you to pray to the Lord that he will bless me.”¹ When he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires, he chose for his Episcopal motto the phrase *miserando atque eligendo*, “lowly and yet chosen.” With these words he expressed his own unworthiness for the office of Bishop, to serve the Lord and his Church in this way, but trusting in the will and grace of the Lord he accepted his appointment.

We saw in his expression yesterday how sincerely he knows himself to be lowly and yet chosen for such an exalted office of service as that of the papacy. It is for this reason that we have come to the altar of the Lord, to pray that Pope Francis will be fortified with good health, a humble courage, and a missionary zeal to faithfully fulfill his ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the Universal Church.

You know this is no simple or easy task, particularly in our own time when so many in the Western world have turned away from the Lord to worship false gods or even to worship themselves. Though many will for a

time rejoice in the light of Pope Francis' love for the poor, soon they will reject him because of his teachings about what it means to live a moral life, in other words, a fully human life. The Holy Father's love for the poor and his adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ clearly demonstrate what it means to be a faithful disciple of the Lord; the two cannot be separated from each other, but must remain always together.

At the same time, though, we know that in the Eastern and Southern hemispheres the Church is growing and incorporating new members at astonishing and happy rates. The truth of the Gospel is being proclaimed and a great many people, both young and old, rich and poor, are receiving it with grow joy and entrusting themselves to the Lord.

Pope Francis' great task of rebuilding the Church will be to gather us all together in the Lord, to keep us in Him, and to lead us in the ways of holiness so that the love of God may be always found in us (cf. John 5:42). Together the Pope and people will need to look to the example of the little poor man of Assisi to learn how to live each day the words Saint Francis spoke before his death: "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord our God, for up to now we have hardly progressed."²

As we receive the Lord into our hearts in this Eucharist, let us ask him in a particular way to fill Pope Francis with that same joy and trust that marked the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, whose love for God's creation and whose poverty and humility have inspired so many others to become saints. May our Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception, lead Pope Francis ever closer to her Son so that our new Holy Father will always remain a shepherd after his own heart (cf. Jeremiah 3:15).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, Address at the Apostolic Blessing *Urbi et Orbi*, March 13, 2013.

² Saint Francis of Assisi, in Saint Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, 14.1.