

**Statement by Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento on the election of Pope Francis
March 14, 2013**

With a tranquil grace, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio stood before the buoyant sea of humanity that filled the outstretched arms of Bernini's columns with a jubilant noise. His brother cardinals pressed around him as he stood upon the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. The balconies on either side bustled with the other members from the College of Cardinals leaning forward to see their chosen brother assume the apostolic stole bearing the figures of Peter and Paul with which he would impart his first blessing as Pope Francis.

The new Holy Father departed from the ritual pageantry of the papal announcement for a brief moment, asking the gathered faithful to first pray for God's blessing upon him. The crowded piazza was enveloped in a silent communion of hearts.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, spoke of fraternity. He twice used that word, speaking of both the Church and the World. So much of the commentary leading to the white smoke rising from the Sistine Chapel spoke of the tensions within the Church as well as the Church's increasingly adversarial tensions with the World. The Holy Father's use of the word "fraternity" spoke to a different reality of the Church as well as one of her deeper yearnings for the world. Much of the media's musings concerned the Church's teaching, but the Church is more than a body of doctrine. The Church is a living body of faith and charity, the Body of Christ. Pope Francis's predecessor, Benedict XVI, spoke about truth and charity complementing one another. Either falls short of its full meaning without the other. Together they create within the Church a fraternal communion.

Pope Francis has yet to elaborate his vision, but the word "fraternity" suggests a desire to craft a fraternal harmony from the truth and charity of gospel. His choice of Francis is a deliberate link to the holy legacy of St. Francis of Assisi, a renowned saint of the Church, whose manner was imbued with both truth and charity. His simplicity of life was an expression of fraternal communion that would reach the radical expression of the stigmata, a sign of union with the crucified Christ. His own body spoke the truth of his personal love for Christ. In turn, his self-surrendering love revealed the truth of Christ's charity for the world. Does this point to the Holy Father's purpose for this name?

Pundits will ponder this election for signs of any possible change. We should return to the rhythm of Lent and look to the same place as the young man of Assisi did long ago.

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Cor. 1.22-24)