
Francis, in frailty, influencer of the Holy Spirit

It's not a matter of rank or social or pseudo-social pre-eminence, ... it's not about the higher up you are, the more you are worth, or the more you influence, the more you are an *influencer*.... Our relationship with the Bishop of Rome is different and far more elevated and, moreover, marked by gratuitousness. This is of no little value in a society like ours, where everything is dictated by income and expenditure charts and money flows. Must we be reminded of its definition? The dung of the devil. Hence everything would stink *For us, Francis is first of all a suffering person needing our support at a time of difficulty in his life.* Like all persons who are ill or suffering today, undoubtedly, some would say. Surely, but this is the crux of the matter: a Christian who aspires to be such in practice, rather than merely proclaiming it with vain platitudes, is not an *influencer* who lures followers and makes money in abundance. *The faithful identifies themselves as journeyers, lifelong pilgrims, pilgrims among pilgrims, showing solidarity.* Should they withdraw into their shells and embrace what they perceive as good, in this case prayer, they would perish. Prayer means opening one's heart - not with romantic sentimentality but with full personal depth, including intelligence - to the gift of life received from the One who is our Father, our Creator. God knows our needs, He accompanies us on our journey to meet Him and build a world in which every person can live with dignity and joy. *Prayer, however, is something that cannot be confined, for its purpose is to be left free: it touches, penetrates, heals, expands and simultaneously reaches out to everyone and anyone.* It transcends latitudes and longitudes, it is an intangible and therefore ubiquitous reality. Why focus on one person or one event? Not because all together we enhance the gifts that pour forth from the goodness of the Almighty, but because *it changes and shapes our souls, it enables us to show solidarity, to be more sensitive to the needs of others, to be less focused on our own needs, whether real or perceived.* We absorb the refining fire that removes the dross, clarifies and reaches out to everything and everyone. Does placing ailing Francis at the centre of our prayers invalidate what has been said? Certainly if the said Francis wished to accumulate, to obtain a check for a supposedly more or less celestial ATM... *But Francis for us is Father, indeed of all Christians, but not only, as he has consistently reiterated, Father of all without distinction.* Now, pouring out our prayerful and intercessory heart onto him is tantamount to supporting him in his gift of self-dispossession, of poverty, of need, to render his gift of self incandescent. It's not an interplay of chromatic tricks and special filters. In fact, it is the reality of all hearts being gathered into one: *Francis receives, Francis bestows wholeheartedly, and thus all together we are caught up in the whirlwind blowing over all.* That wind which is the Spirit touches everyone and offers light to all so that they may embrace the Father's Plan of Salvation. *The positive effect is guaranteed: all of us, prayerful and intercessors, anonymous yet present to Him as children of the same Father, benefit therefrom.* Everyone is augured to recover from illness, but everyone is also augured to render their bed an altar on which to glorify the Most High and our self-giving response.

Is not Francis, in frailty, an influencer of the Holy Spirit?

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