

CHURCH IN CONFUSION

Priest excommunicated in Italy, just sanction but problem remains

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News of the sanctions adopted by the Bishop of Livorno, Monsignor Simone Giusti, against the parish priest of San Ranieri in Guasticce, Father Ramon Guidetti, has made international headlines. On 1 January 2024, the bishop's chancellor, Fr Matteo Giavazzi,

informed the clergy and faithful of the Tuscan diocese that Fr Guidetti had incurred excommunication *latae sententiae* for having performed "an act of a schismatic nature" during the Eucharistic Celebration on 31 December 2023, "refusing submission to the Supreme Pontiff and communion with the members of the Church subject to him".

Let us examine what happened. During Mass on 31 December, Father Guidetti delivered a long homily lasting about twenty minutes, greeted with a final round of applause, in which the parish priest essentially explained that Benedict XVI would never renounce the *munus petrino* and would therefore remain pope until the day of his death; Francis would therefore not be a true pope. In his homily, Father Guidetti hailed 'Father Alessandro Maria Minutella', the Palermo priest excommunicated in 2018 and dismissed from the clerical state in November 2021, as a 'champion of the truth'. He then named the seven priests who have joined Minutella in the Marian Priestly Sodality, according to Fr Guidetti, 'the Magnificent Seven', all of whom have been affected by ecclesiastical sanctions.

Towards the middle of his homily, Father Guidetti began to raise the tone, referring to the "false church, of Mr Bergoglio and his mercenaries", criticising priests, bishops and cardinals "who continue to twiddle their thumbs and know everything", i.e. "they know that there has been a schism for ten years, they know that there is Freemasonry that governs, they know that this is not the pope, they know but they keep silent. And then they keep silent'. Then the reference to Bergoglio as the "unnamed, I will not name him (...) a Freemason, a Jesuit Freemason linked to the globalist powers, usurper and antipope". And the announcement: 'And from tomorrow, these worthy sachets will be joined by the undersigned'.

These were the most significant words of the homily. Monsignor Giusti added some details of the affair in his interview with Livorno's *Il Telegrafo*; Don Ramon "had already been warned not to perform that act before Christmas and in the end had agreed to go along with his intentions, understanding the seriousness of the matter. Then at the mass on 31 December, his breaking statement, unexpected at that point, contesting the election of Pope Francis, his ministry and his authority, celebrating not in communion with the Pope, with a schismatic attitude'. The Bishop of Livorno therefore clarified that the priest had already been recalled and had apparently accepted the recall. Moreover, Father Guidetti had celebrated a non-cum Mass, that is, a Mass in which, during the Eucharistic Prayer, there was no mention of the Pope, as happens during the time of the *sede vacante*.

The bishop continued: 'I called him on 31 December after the Mass and he did not

answer. He had already packed his bags and had left the keys not with me, but with a lady from the parish, leaving immediately afterwards, sucked into schismatic groups opposed to the Church. It had all been pre-arranged'. Therefore, the decision taken by the bishop to make known the excommunication *latæ sententiæ*, in which the priest incurred *ipso facto* for schism, appears to be motivated by several acts of a schismatic nature carried out by the former parish priest: public declaration that Francis is not pope, refusal to celebrate a *cum*, sudden abandonment of the parish to join a schismatic association.

The confirmation of joining a schism comes from the mouth of Father Guidetti himself, who commented on the sanctions of the bishop of Livorno as follows: 'I will make a nice little frame for it and hang it on the wall and it will be something I will gladly boast about', thus disavowing the authority of his own bishop.

As undoubtedly irritating as it is to see sanctions being taken with extreme speed against priests who criticise the current pontificate, while they are not imposed or even taken away from multiple abusers and heretics, the fact remains that the sanctions taken by Msgr Giusti are correct. This point must be clarified: don Guidetti has not simply criticised, even in strong tones, actions, words, documents of this pontificate, but has usurped the Church's judgement on who is or is not the legitimate pontiff. The problem is not to have doubts in the internal forum, as long as they are well-founded; but to recognise that these are precisely doubts, which await a judgement by the only authority that can pronounce in this area: the Church.

In addition to the clear position of St. Robert Bellarmine on the question of the heretical pope (see here), we must also recall the classical position of St. Thomas (cf. *Summa Theologiæ* III, q. 82, a. 9): it is only from the Church's ruling that it becomes licit and obligatory to no longer communicate with schismatics, heretics and excommunicates, i.e. not to attend their masses and not to receive the sacraments from them. A similar argument applies to the legitimacy of a pope, who has been recognised as such by the universality of the Church, as doubts were only raised long afterwards (around the end of 2015) and never found an echo among the legitimate members of the episcopate. Prior to a possible Church ruling, anyone who arrogates the right to judge the legitimacy of a pope usurps the Church's judgment.

Another fact remains, which must give pause for thought. Father Ramon's homily was greeted by a roar of applause. Nor can it be overlooked that various schismatic movements, including the Marian Priestly Sodality, are seeing more and more sympathisers. It is a fact: the increasingly marked confusion and serious problems of

this pontificate are driving more and more people out of the Church. And this problem is not solved by sanctioning, albeit justifiably, one or more priests. Anger and unrest are growing out of all proportion among the faithful and the clergy, leading them to take positions that, instead of helping the Church, hurt it even more, as well as seriously endangering the salvation of souls. *Fiducia supplicans* was a further tragic and culpable push in this direction.

The pastors of the Church must take responsibility for this part of the flock, go to them for all their legitimate requests, without continuing to get bitter against these faithful, who need sacred liturgies, sound doctrine, effective and affective closeness from their pastors. And they must make this clear to Pope Francis, who is at the origin of increasingly exasperating actions and words.