NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Pope Francis and the invocation of Blessed Imelda

Megan Fincher | Sep. 19, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Who is Blessed Imelda and why does Pope Francis like to invoke her name?

In his historic interview [1] with Jesuit editors for *La Civiltà Cattolica* and *America* magazine, Francis referred to Blessed Imelda in discussing his work as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, especially during the time when the country was under the rule of a military junta.

"I lived a time of great interior crisis when I was in Cordova. To be sure, I have never been like Blessed Imelda [goody-goody], but I have never been a right-winger. It was my authoritarian way of making decisions that created problems," Francis said in his interview. The bracketed description of Imelda was inserted by the editors at *America*.

Her name also popped up during another highly publicized press event, when Pope Francis held an impromptu press conference July 28 on board his plane as it was headed home from World Youth Day in Brazil.

"There are saints in the Curia. And there are also some who aren't so saintly ... We have this monsignor in jail, I think he's still in jail. He is not in jail because he resembled Blessed Imelda; in fact, he isn't a 'blessed,' " Francis told the journalists [2] on the plane with him.

Essentially, he is using her name in an expression common in Argentina similar to Americans' use of "I'm no saint, but ... "

A quick look at a couple of websites (catholic.org [3] and willingshepherds.org [4]) devoted to the saints tell a wonderfully poignant story of a young girl devoted to God:

Imelda Lambertini of Bologna was born in 1322 to an extremely pious family. She learned how to read from the Psalter, and with her mother's guidance, she cared for the neighborhood's poor.

Imelda was just 9 years old when God called her to religious life. She entered a Dominican convent, but her tender age barred her from reciting the Midnight Office, as well as from receiving the Eucharist.

Lonely and longing to be fully accepted by the community, Imelda spent her time meditating and reading about the saints. According to legend, St. Agnes took pity on her and began appearing to Imelda regularly. Since Agnes was martyred at the age of 13, the two little girls became close friends, and spent most of their time together whispering about heaven.

During her first Christmas in the convent, Imelda broke down weeping before the crèche. She had begged her community to let her receive Communion, but according to church law at the time, she had to wait until she was 12 years old.

That spring, on the Vigil of the Ascension, Imelda once again pleaded for the Eucharist, but the officiating priest refused her. Imelda would not take "no" for an answer this time, so she fervently asked Jesus for the grace to

receive him.

After Mass, when nearly everyone had left the chapel, Imelda continued to pray. The sacristan noticed a growing bright light above Imelda's head, and within the glow, a eucharistic host appeared.

The chaplain ran forward with a paten, and Imelda finally received the body of Christ. With a rapturous smile on her face and her hands upraised, Imelda instantly died on her knees. Those who tell the story say her heart broke from the greatness of Jesus' love.

Her body never decomposed, and visitors can pray before the little patroness of First Communion at the Church of San Sigismondo in Bologna.

Editors note: We can send you an biweekly email alert with content from The Francis Chronicles. Follow the directions on our email alert sign up page [5].

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-31 02:55*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-francis-and-invocation-blessed-imelda

Links:
[1] http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview
[2] http://cvcomment.org/2013/08/04/full-english-transcript-of-the-popes-80-minute-21-question-interview-aboard-the-papal-plane/
[3] http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=125
[4] http://www.willingshepherds.org/Dominican%20Saints%20May.html
[5] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup