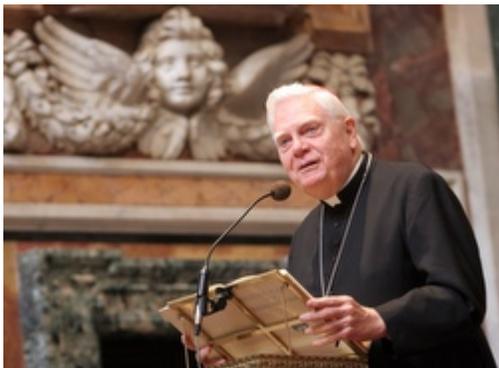


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In Rome, Law's just another cardinal in winter

by John L. Allen Jr.



Cardinal Bernard Law is seen addressing a group of pilgrims at the basilica in this November 2007 photo. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic)

ROME -- December 8 is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a national holiday in Italy. For those Americans who may wonder what Cardinal Bernard Law is up to these days, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception also provides one piece of the answer.

Since the time of John XXIII, the Feast Day's traditional highlight is a papal outing to the Piazza di Spagna, where the pontiff prays before a column of the Immaculate Conception inaugurated by Pius IX a century and a half ago, three years after the formal proclamation of the dogma in 1854. Flowers will also be deposited at the column, following a custom begun under Pius XII.

Benedict XVI will make the traditional visit this afternoon at 4:00 pm Rome time.

Law, of course, is the former Archbishop of Boston who resigned in December 2002 amid the sexual abuse crisis that erupted in the United States. In May 2004 he was appointed the Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Mary Major ? a move viewed in Rome as a ?soft landing? for a prelate whose career had stalled in

disgrace, though one that generated (and still generates) controversy in the States, where the job is instead sometimes popularly understood as a kind of papal honor.

In Rome, being the Archpriest of St. Mary Major, in itself, is generally not perceived as terribly prestigious.

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