

Every year, apparently, the Prior of Francesca Romana (our monastery in Rome) blesses all the cars outside in the road leading down to the Colosseum on the Feast of St Frances, whose body is still on display in the Church there and who was named by Pope Pius XI as patron of motorists, supposedly because for several years – among her many attributes – she had a continuous vision of her guardian angel and, presumably, Italian drivers of that period needed special prayer as so many Italian women were widowed as a result of their young husband's reckless driving. She would have understood their loss! (I'm being naughty here)

But this is to stereotype, not only young male Italians but their widows for, as our three readings today show, widows differ in their qualities just as you and I differ from everyone else. Judith and Anna and the variety of widows mentioned in Paul's letter to Timothy are witness to this, and as they say of autistic people 'you've seen one autistic person; so you've seen one autistic person' so we can say of widows 'you've seen one widow; so you've seen one widow'. The whole mystery of humanity is present here and the whole mystery of creation, of life in all its diversity: Judith is noted for her courage, Anna for her faithful attendance at the Temple and her prophetic insight, and St Frances of Rome for her generosity to the poor. If they have anything in common it's the inspiration they derive from their faith in God: *inspiration* meaning literally *in-spired* – inhabited, that is, by God's Spirit. And this is possible for us all, widowed or not, Italian or not, car drivers or not. It's the blessing which makes divinity possible and each of us a unique working out of God's grace, irreducibly different, irreducibly one. 'You've seen one human being; so you've seen one human being'

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