

## *The Revolutions of Pope Francis*

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The momentous occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation two years ago on February 11, 2013, stands as an important moment in the life of the Catholic Church and in the life of the world. To his brother Cardinals gathered in consistory that February morning last year, he startled them, the Church and the entire world with these moving words:

*“After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry. I am well aware that this ministry, due to its essential spiritual nature, must be carried out not with words and deeds, but no less with prayer and suffering. However, in today's world, subject to so many rapid changes and shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith, in order to govern the bark of Saint Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary, strength which in the last few months, has deteriorated in me to the extent that I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me. For this reason, and well aware of the seriousness of this act, with full freedom I declare that I renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter, entrusted to me by the Cardinals on 19 April 2005, in such a way, that as from 28 February 2013, at 20:00 hours, the See of Rome, the See of Saint Peter, will be vacant and a Conclave to elect the new Supreme Pontiff will have to be convoked by those whose competence it is.”*

Benedict XVI submitted his resignation freely, in accordance with the Church's *Code of Canon Law*. It was an unprecedented decision in modern history and offers the church and the world a profound teaching moment. It is perfectly in line with one of the greatest teachers of the faith that the church has ever known. By his bold and courageous decision, Benedict told us that we must be painfully honest with the human condition, that we cannot be enchained by history. A man who had been the champion of tradition and labeled "conservative" left us with one of the most progressive gestures made by any pope. This man known for brilliant writing, exquisite kindness, charity, gentleness, humility and clarity of teaching, offered us the epitome of a courageous and humble decision that will forever mark the papacy and the life of the Church. Benedict's resignation provides a rare but

profound example of humility in action. True leaders put their cause before their power and self-interest. Far from a failure or weakness, his resignation was the most shining moment of Benedict's papacy, and what will turn out to be a historically brilliant move.

Today many feel that in order to highlight the positive aspects of the “Franciscan” era, we must describe in negative terms the pontificate of Pope Benedict. That is not only absurd, but it also indicates blindness, deafness and ignorance to what this great man accomplished. Comparisons between Francis and his predecessor are inevitable, and it’s no secret that Pope Francis is more appealing to the crowds... the huge masses that continue to throng the Vatican to catch glimpse of the first Pope from the New World. There is a shift in tone under Francis in what could be described as a "moderate" or “pastoral” direction and a real concern for those on the peripheries of society and the Church.

As Cardinals gathered in Rome and met in secret sessions (at least we thought they were secret!) to assess the state of the Church and trace a profile of the next pope, many of you saw Fr. Lombardi, Msgr. Gil Tamayo and me answering hundreds of questions on a daily basis from the media around the world. Those daily televised press conferences and briefings topped some of the Italian soap operas for viewership.

Questions coming to us at press conferences and briefings revealed an immense interest (some would say obsession) in things Church! From the Italian fascination with the retired Pope’s abandonment of the red shoes; to the Mexicans’ delight with the emeritus Pope’s predilection for brown loafers from Leon, Mexico; to the Germans’ intense preoccupation with environmental dangers of black and white smoke pollution over the city of Rome; to the French “souci” with just about everything, and again to the Italian preoccupations with the sealing of Papal apartments and the smashing of Papal seals... we had our hands full. The world was watching and listening. I chuckled several times thinking that the Church had made such great strides these past years in the area of social communications. But for such a major event and happening as a conclave, we still relied on smoke signals.

***Cardinal Bergoglio’s intervention during the pre-conclave meetings of Cardinals. March 2013 - March 7, 2013: The Sweet and Comforting Joy of Evangelizing***

Evangelization is the *raison d'être* of the Church -- "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing" (Paul VI). It is Jesus Christ himself who impels us from within.

- To evangelize implies apostolic zeal. To evangelize implies a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries not only in the geographic sense but also the existential peripheries: those of the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance, of doing without religion, of thought and of all misery.

- When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referent and then she gets sick. (cf. The hunchback woman of the Gospel). The evils that over the course of time happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in a self-reference and a sort of theological narcissism. In Revelation, Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks. Evidently the text refers to his knocking from outside in order to enter but I think of the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. The self-referent Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him come out.

- When the Church is self-referent without realizing it, she believes she has her own light. She ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* and gives way to that very great evil which is spiritual worldliness (according to De Lubac, it is the worst evil that can come upon the Church). The self-referent Church lives to give glory only to one another. In simple terms, there are two images of the Church: the evangelizing Church that comes out of herself; the *Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fidente proclamans*, and the worldly Church that lives within herself, of herself, for herself. This must give light to the possible changes and reforms which must be made for the salvation of souls.

- Thinking of the next Pope, he must be a man that from the contemplation and adoration of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to come out to the existential peripheries, that helps her to be the fruitful mother who lives from the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.

## *The Conclave*

When the College of Cardinals finally entered into the conclave on Tuesday afternoon, March 12, the excitement and expectation were palpable. As much as Italy tried to dominate the whole process, and delight in the so-called Vatileaks that continued to flow during the pre-conclave meetings, they got it all wrong... as did many others throughout the world who stared in utter amazement at the man who appeared on the loggia of St. Peter's basilica the night of March 13.

With the "Habemus Papam" came the name of a stranger, and outsider, who instantly won over the crowd in the Piazza and the entire world with the words, "Fratelli e Sorelle, buona sera!" (Brothers and sisters, good evening!) Who would believe a pontificate beginning with those simple, common words? Never in my wildest imaginings did I expect a Pope to be called Francis! Nor could I comprehend the scene of well over one hundred thousand cheering people suddenly becoming still and silent as Papa Francesco bowed and asked them to pray for him and pray over him. It was the most moving moment I have ever experienced at a Vatican celebration. His words "Pray for me..." still resound in my ears.

From the very first moments, Pope Francis stressed his role with the ancient title of "bishop of Rome" who presides in charity, echoing the famous statement of Ignatius of Antioch. Francis has brought to the papacy a knack for significant gestures that immediately convey very powerful messages.

At his first public audience with nearly 6000 journalists in Rome on March 16, three days after his election in March 2013, Pope Francis said: *"Ecclesial events are certainly no more intricate than political or economic events! But they do have one particular underlying feature: they follow a pattern which does not readily correspond to the "worldly" categories which we are accustomed to use, and so it is not easy to interpret and communicate them to a wider and more varied public. The Church is certainly a human and historical institution with all that that entails, yet her nature is not essentially political but spiritual: the Church is the People of God, the Holy People of God making its way to encounter Jesus Christ. Only from this perspective can a satisfactory account be given of the Church's life and activity"*.

This afternoon I would like to speak to you about Pope Francis and how he is communicating with the Church and the world over the past two years. To begin, I wish to share a conversation I had earlier this as I met with senior journalists at the ABC Television Network in New York City on behalf of the Holy See Press Office. A gentleman who headed up the network's massive coverage of the Papal Transition two years ago remarked: "Look, Fr. Tom, whether one is Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Muslim, left or right, or nothing at all, for many of us for whom the Church was on a distant horizon, we have all been brought into the heart of the Church and the Gospel and find the story fascinating and inviting."

It is precisely this fascination that has gripped the world over the past two years. But let me begin with this fundamental point: if today we are basking in the Franciscan light, it is because we owe a debt of gratitude to Pope emeritus Benedict XVI and his courageous decision to step down two years ago February 11, an important moment in the life of the Catholic Church and in the life of the world.

From the very first moments, Pope Francis stressed his role with the ancient title of "bishop of Rome" who presides in charity, echoing the famous statement of Ignatius of Antioch. Francis has brought to the papacy a knack for significant gestures that immediately convey very powerful messages. Pope Francis' vision of the Church challenges all of us. He has an amazing ability to find simple words to pose fundamental questions about the life of the Christian and of the Church. No one can deny that the "secular media" has been fascinated and mesmerized by his expressions that come from daily homilies, addresses, and messages:

***"How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor!"***

***"Have a good Sunday, and a good lunch!"***

***"Priests must be shepherds with the smell of the sheep."***

***"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone!"***

***"We have fallen into a "globalization of indifference."***

***"Who am I to judge?"***

*“I want things messy and stirred up in the church. I want the church to take to the streets!”*

*“I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.”*

*“It was my authoritarian way of making decisions that created problems.”*

*“I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.”*

*“The image of the Church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God.”*

*“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”*

*“God never tires of forgiving us.”*

*“The dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent.”*

*“I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life.”*

*“An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral.”*

*I dream of a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything.”*

*“Mercy is the greatest of all virtues.”*

*“The confessional must not be a torture chamber.”*

*“The Church is not a tollhouse.”*

*“I beg you bishops, avoid the scandal of being airport bishops!”*

*“We need to promote a culture of encounter.”*

*“How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?”*

Asked if he would ever baptize Martians, *Pope Francis responded: “Who am I to close the door?”*

In his daily homily on June 11 of this year, speaking those who are always searching for some “novelty” in their Christian identity, he said:

***“Where are the visionaries who can tell us exactly what message Our Lady will be sending at 4’o’clock this afternoon?”***

Initially perhaps many of us (myself included) may have thought that Pope Francis’ free-flowing interviews, homilies and quotes are more a source of consternation and frustration than opportunities to learn more about the Church, her founder and her message. But Francis has chosen many different opportunities to speak and encounter the world. Now matter how fraught with the potential confusion and misinterpretation those methods may sometimes be, the world is now listening to the Pope in ways that have never happened before. No longer can we simply attribute this interest to an initial fascination, a “honeymoon period”, or other infantile ways of trying to analyze what is really happening. Let me be very honest: we are no longer in the “honeymoon” period of this Pontificate. The world is listening because Francis and the Church have something solid to say and to offer to a world plunged in chaos, war, terror, violence, despair and darkness.

What is the most important achievement of Pope Francis? He has rebranded Catholicism and the papacy. Prior to Pope Francis, when many people on the street were asked: "What is the Catholic church all about? What does the pope stand for?", the response would often be, "Catholics, well they are against abortion, gay marriage and birth control." “They are known for the sex abuse crisis that has terribly marred and weakened their moral authority and credibility. Though the media rightly exposed our sins for the abuse crisis, at the same it often falsely portrays us for our teaching and values at the core of our Catholic beliefs.

Today, the response is different. What do they say about us now? What do they say about the Pope? People are speaking about our leader who is unafraid to confront the sins and evils that have marred us. We have a pope who is concerned about mercy, compassion and love, especially for the poor. Whether we wish to admit it or not, Pope Francis has won over the media. By no means is this an indication that the teachings of the Church

and message of the Gospel have been fully understood or received by all. Nevertheless, something has shifted in terms of Church-media relations. Many of my colleagues in the “secular” media industry have said that Francis has made it fun to be a religion reporter and journalist again. He has changed the image of the church so much that our prestigious graduate schools of business and management could use him as a case study in rebranding.

To those in several countries who have said that the Pope is not speaking out enough against abortion, Pope Francis is profoundly Pro-Life. He is simply doing what the Bishop of Rome and successor of Peter should do, positioning the evil of abortion within its proper moral context, the failure to recognize the dignity of every single human person at every age and stage of life. Procured abortion is only one of the poisonous fruits from the rotted tree growing in the corrupted garden of a culture of death.

Over the past two years, Pope Francis has strongly denounced efforts to redefine marriage, and issued a thundering condemnation of abortion, euthanasia, and in-vitro fertilization, calling them “sins against God.” In emphasizing these truths, Francis has never urged withdrawal from the public square; on the contrary, he has declared: “Getting involved in politics is a Christian duty. We Christians cannot be like Pilate and wash our hands clean of things.”

“The principal mission of the Church,” Pope Francis has declared, “is evangelization, bringing the Good News to everyone.” This was also Pope Benedict’s mantra at the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization: “The Church exists to evangelize.” This is the only agenda of Pope Francis: to lead people to Jesus Christ, so that their lives and joy may be full.

In two years at the helm of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis has opened the floodgates of communication in an institution that has been effectively cloistered for centuries. While it is no exaggeration that a pope has never been so widely quoted by the secular press, it could also be said that a pope’s intentions have never been so widely misinterpreted. While it may seem like the pope is sending mixed signals, the truth may be that most of the press and non-Catholics are just projecting their own wishes and values on him.

He is not quite "conservative" nor entirely "progressive. His message is filled the paradoxes because life is a paradox and Christian life is a great paradox. The world is listening to him because Francis models a solid consistency, the one between his words and deeds, and that between its current papal mission and life forever. It gives us great shepherd a beautiful model of the new evangelization.

### ***Globalization of Indifference***

Francis startled the world in July 2013, several months after his election, when he traveled rather spontaneously to the island of Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily- to that dangerous area where so many refugees have lost and continue to lose their lives in their journeys to freedom and safety. The Holy Father's voice rang out across the sea as he asked the world to reflect on:

*“The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!”*

### ***Ecumenism***

In four brief, daily homilies from 2013-2014, I believe that we have four very distinct lenses or hermeneutical keys through which we may understand Pope Francis' *modus operandi* in relating to other Christians and people of good will of other faith communities.

1) Paul does not say to the Athenians: “This is the encyclopedia of truth. Study this and you have the truth, the truth.” The truth does not enter into an encyclopedia. The truth is an encounter - it is a meeting with Supreme Truth: Jesus, the great truth. No one owns the truth. We receive the truth when we meet it in a person. His name is Jesus. Francis warns that, Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians who are not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus Christ. The Pope exhorted Christians to do as Paul did and begin to “build bridges and to move forward.”

2) Faith that passes through a distiller becomes an ideology- because ideologies are rigid, always and because Christian ideology is rigid, moralistic, ethical, but without kindness; this Christian ideology is a serious illness.

3) "Humility, gentleness, magnanimity: These are weak things, because the humble person appears good for nothing; gentleness, meekness on the surface appear useless; yet generosity means being open to all, having a big heart. The weaker we are with these virtues of humility, generosity, gentleness, meekness, the stronger we become as stones in this Temple.

4) It is so difficult to listen to the voice of Jesus, the voice of God, when you believe that that the whole world revolves around you: there is no horizon, because you become your own horizon. Yet there is something deeper underlying all of this: the fear of gratuity. We are afraid of God's gratuity. He is so great that we fear Him.

### ***Pope visits Waldensian temple in Turin***

Today, on the second day of his Apostolic Visit to the northern Italian industrial city of Turin, Pope Francis made an historic visit to the Waldensian temple. Although numbering only about 30,000 adherents, the Waldensian Evangelical Church is an important dialogue partner with the Catholic Church, as it is one of the only non-Catholic Christian communities native to Italy. The early morning meeting marked the first time a Pope had visited a Waldensian house of worship.

### ***The rediscovery of fraternity notwithstanding the differences: a communion on a journey***

The Pope went on to speak about the fruits of the ecumenical movement in recent years. The principle fruit, he said, "is the rediscovery of the fraternity that unites all those who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized in His Name." This, he said, "allows us to grasp the profound ties that already unite us, despite our differences. It concerns a communion that is still on a journey, which, with prayer, with continual personal and communal conversion, and with the help of the theologians, we hope, trusting in the action of the Holy Spirit, can become full and visible communion in truth and charity."

### ***The Catholic Church seeks forgiveness for past sins against Waldensians***

“But the unity that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit,” the Pope said, “does not mean uniformity. Brothers have in common the same origin, but they are not identical among themselves.” Unfortunately, he continued, historically this diversity was not accepted and was a cause of violence and disputes “committed in the name of the faith itself.” This history, the Pope said, can only grieve us, who pray for the grace “to recognize that we are all sinners and to know to forgive one another.” He then asked for forgiveness for “the non-Christian attitudes and behaviour” of the Catholic Church against Waldensians.

### ***Differences should not be an obstacle to collaboration in evangelization and in works***

One of the primary areas that is open to the possibility of collaboration between Waldensians and Catholics, he said, is evangelization. Another is “that of service to humanity which suffers, to the poor, the sick, the migrants.” The differences that continue to exist between Catholics and Waldensians on important anthropological and ethical questions, the Pope said, should not prevent us from finding ways to collaborate in these and other fields: “If we journey together,” he said, “the Lord will help us to live that communion that precedes every contrast.”

### ***Francis and Orthodox Christianity***

With Pope Francis we are witnessing a growing cooperation among the recognized leaders from the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The idea of Orthodox Christians being able to learn from the Pope of Rome appears foreign to many of us. The renewed Roman efforts of outreach to Orthodox Christians have not passed unnoticed. Orthodox Christians are learning from the unique witness of Pope Francis. He is in many ways a bishop who reflects the Christianity of the first millennium when the Church was undivided. Pope Francis also models a form of leadership that is badly needed in Orthodox Christianity today. Let me offer a few lessons that Francis is offering to the East. I would like to refer to three distinctive qualities emerging from the Papacy of Pope Francis. The Bishop of Rome is teaching us each day that authentic power is service. There is no place for the trappings of power, privilege and prestige in the exercise of Francis’ Petrine ministry. Francis shocked many on that first Holy Thursday night in

2013 when he visited a youth detention center in Rome and chose to wash the feet of young offenders, including one who was an Orthodox Christian. If we do not learn this Christian rule and posture of servanthood, we will never be able to understand Jesus' true message about true power.

Second, Francis has taught us about life on the peripheries of society. Pope Francis challenges Orthodox Christians with the following words: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." A risk-taking Church that is not afraid to fail is much healthier than a Church that is focused on institutional security and closed in on itself. Such a lesson is not only meant for the Churches of the West.

Third, Francis has repeatedly taught us that evangelization, by its very nature a "noisy" business. Pope Francis provided this bold exhortation to young people in Rio de Janeiro: "Let me tell you what I hope will be the outcome of World Youth Day: I hope there will be noise. ... I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves."

Francis has written: "Christians of the East and West must give common witness so that, strengthened by the Spirit of the risen Christ, they may disseminate the message of salvation to the entire world."

### *Laudato Sì*

In his self-described "joyful and troubling", profound 246-paragraph magisterial document, the first Pope from the New World is asking the entire world to consider what the best science on climate change is telling us, and "letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows." Past popes have written on the importance of protecting the environment, on favoring the poorest and on rethinking our direction as a species. But this is a major piece of work, and an ardent call from one of our world's major leaders for us to work together to address this existential problem.

The greatest contribution of *Laudato Si*, is an overview of the environmental crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the dialogue about the environment has been framed mainly using political, scientific and economic language. Now, the language of faith enters the discussion -- clearly, decisively and systematically.

The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor is strongly highlighted in almost every page of the document, and the Pope provides many baneful examples of the effects of climate change, whose "worst impact" is felt by those in developing countries (25).

Pope Francis takes aim at the "technocratic" mindset, in which technology is seen as the key to human existence. He also critiques an unthinking reliance on market forces, in which every technological advancement is embraced before considering how it will affect our world. Christian spirituality, by contrast, offers a growth marked by "moderation and the capacity to be happy with little" (222).

Against those who argue that a papal encyclical on the environment has no real authority, Pope Francis explicitly states that *Laudato Si* "is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching" (15). It continues the church's reflection on modern-day problems that began with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, on capital and labor, published in 1891.

*Laudato Si* is a "systematic" approach to the problem. First, the Pope links all human beings to creation: "We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it" (139). But our decisions have an inevitable effect on the environment. A blind pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalized and the ruination of the planet are connected.

Pope Francis does not try to "prove" anything about climate change. Rather, his encyclical accepts the best scientific research available today and builds on it. So *Laudato Si* draws on both church teaching and contemporary scientific findings from other fields to help modern-day people reflect on a contemporary crisis.

Perhaps more than any other encyclical, *Laudato Si* draws from the experiences of people around the world, referencing the findings of bishops' conferences from Brazil, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Bolivia, Portugal,

Germany, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Australia, Canada and the United States.

This encyclical, addressed to "everyone living on this planet" calls for a new way of looking at things (3). We face an urgent crisis, when the earth has begun to look more and more like, in Francis's vivid image, "an immense pile of filth" (21). Still, the document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, all of us can strive to change course. We can move towards an "ecological conversion" in which we can listen to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (49). To use religious language, what the Pope is calling for is conversion.

The timing of the pope's remarks is also very important. This year countries are both negotiating to reach a global agreement in Paris in December and also individually putting forward their own pledges on what they will do, called INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) in UN lingo.

Pope Francis' encyclical letter is really the crowning of all of the small and big efforts of so many individuals and faith communities. Many religious groups are taking action in their houses of worship to reduce their energy waste and divest from fossil fuels. In our Catholic tradition there is a "Green Church" movement. Congregations and communities of women religious have really been in the vanguard of this initiative for many years. But perhaps even more strikingly, Christian communities are becoming involved in the major policy efforts that are absolutely fundamental if we are going to reduce the hidden and direct subsidies for fossil fuels and make the transformation to renewable carbon-free energy we need to make in the next 15 years.

## ***Conclusion***

With the surprising election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to the See of Peter two years ago, I have frequently been asked this question: Is this all the work of a PR company, clever media strategists or slick spin doctors hired by the Vatican to rebrand its image? Or is there something else at work? What has happened in the church, and how can it be that a 77-year-old, retirement-bound archbishop from Buenos Aires has captivated the world? How can we describe the sense of springtime that has come upon the church? How is it fathomable in our day and age that not only Christians and

Catholics but millions of others are speaking about “Papa Francesco” as if he were their own?

Let me tell you what I think is afoot! The new Pope took the name Francis upon his election as Bishop of Rome and told us he did so because of his love for Francis of Assisi. Over the past two years, many of us have been associating the Pope’s gestures and actions with the “Poverello” or “Little Poor One” of Assisi, perhaps the most beloved saint of the Catholic tradition.

One day as a young man, Francis heard the plea of Jesus from the crucifix in the dilapidated San Damiano chapel on Assisi’s outskirts. “Go and repair my Church,” he heard Jesus say. And he certainly did that in his lifetime and through the huge Franciscan family that he left behind to carry forward his dream and continue his work.

We become easily fixated on lots of eye-catching, buzz-causing externals and great photo opportunities: A Pope who abandoned the red shoes - that were never an official part of the papal wardrobe! A Pope who dresses modestly, pays his own lodging bills, rides around Vatican City in a Ford Focus, who invites street people to his birthday breakfast. This Roman pontiff specializes in kissing babies and embracing the sick, disfigured broken bodies, and the abandoned of society. A pope who knows how to use a telephone, and uses it often. A pope who waits in line for the coat check at the Vatican Synod Hall, lines up for coffee, and introduces himself: “Sono Francesco. Come ti chiami?” We sit back, smile and utter: “What simplicity!” “Wow!” “Awesome!” “Finalmente!”

And for many who are watching all of this with differing forms of anxiety, they ask “Will the Francis reform succeed?” The answer is: “Yes.” And I will tell you why. Francis’ reform is inevitable because it is not emanating from Assisi, Loyola, Manresa or even from Rome, as significant as those holy places may be! It is coming from another land where we find Bethlehem, Nazareth, Nain, Emmaus, Mount Tabor, Galilee and Jerusalem: the land of the Bible.

On the late afternoon of March 13, 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio received the call to go, rebuild, repair, renew and heal the church. What we have witnessed over the past two years is simply a disciple of Jesus, and a faithful disciple of Ignatius of Loyola and of Francis of Assisi, repairing,

renewing, restoring, reconciling and healing the Church. There are those who delight in describing the new Pope as a bold, brazen revolutionary sent to rock the boat. Others think he has come to cause a massive shipwreck. But the only revolution that Pope Francis has inaugurated is a revolution of tenderness, the very words he used in his recent major letter on "The Joy of the Gospel." [Evangelii Gaudium #88]

And the second revolution he has inaugurated is the revolution of normalcy. What he is doing is normal human, Christian behavior. These are the revolutions at the heart and soul of Pope Francis' ministry. It is his unflinching freedom that allows him to do what he does because he is unafraid and totally free to be himself at the same time of being such faithful son of the Church. It is his goodness, joy, kindness and mercy that introduce us to the tenderness of our God. No wonder why he has taken the world by storm, and why so many people are paying attention to him. No wonder why magazines and newspapers acclaim him as "Person of the Year", "best Dressed man," "Rolling Stone" icon and "Advocate" champion, to name but a few! No wonder why the Pope, and many of those who are trying to serve him and represent him are considered to be subversive!

Francis will succeed because his life, vision, hopes and dreams are founded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are indeed living a moment of kairos, the appointed time and hour, when the Gospel story is unfolding before us once again in the life of Pope Francis. Everything the Pope is doing now is not just an imitation of his patron saint who loved the poor, embraced lepers, charmed sultans, made peace and protected nature. It's a reflection of the child of Bethlehem who would grow up to become the man of the cross in Jerusalem, the Risen One that no tomb could contain, the man we Christians call Savior and Lord. Pope Francis has given us a powerful glimpse into the mind and heart of God.

This Bishop of Rome demands a lot while preaching about a God of mercy, by engaging joyfully with nonbelievers, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and those sitting on the fences of life- many who thought that Christianity has nothing left to add to the equations of life. I go back to those words of my colleague at the ABC network: "We have all been brought into the heart of the Church and the Gospel and find the story fascinating and inviting." We need the Francis revolution of tenderness, mercy and normalcy now more than ever before.

## ***Field Hospitals***

I leave you with this final image from the first Jesuit Pope – the powerful image of the “field hospital” which he uses often that is drawn from the Spiritual Exercises. When Jorge Mario Bergoglio speaks of the church as a “field hospital after a battle” he appeals to Ignatius of Loyola’s understanding of the role of the church in light of God’s gaze upon the world: “so many people ask us to be close, that ask us for what they were asking of Jesus: closeness, nearness.” It is the opposite image of a fortress under siege. The image of a church as a field hospital is not just a simple, pretty poetic metaphor; from this very image we can derive an understanding of both the church’s mission and the sacraments of salvation.

In the heart and mind of Pope Francis, we need “a church that is again capable of restoring citizenship to so many of its children that walk as if in exodus. Christian citizenship is above all the result of God’s mercy. If the church is truly a mother, it needs to respond to its children from its “guts of mercy” (Lk 1:78). Not only from its heart, but precisely from its “guts.” Thus “all are able to participate in some way in the life of the Church, all can be a part of the community, and even doors of the Sacraments should not be closed for any reason”(EG, 47).

I invite you to join me in praying for the Holy Father:

*Lord our God,  
We thank you for always providing shepherds to guide the Church.  
We thank you most especially for Francis,  
the one you have chosen to be our chief shepherd  
and guide at this moment in history.  
Bless him with health and vision, boldness and courage,  
wisdom and compassion, and boundless joy and hope.  
Make him an instrument of your peace, compassion and mercy,  
In your mercy you called Francis and you call each of us  
to cling to Jesus, the rock of fidelity and truth.  
May Pope Francis inspire us to be better Christians,  
faithful Catholics and architects and citizens  
of the civilization of love that your son entrusted to us.  
We ask this in Jesus’ name, who lives with you forever and ever.  
Amen.*