

## THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF POPE FRANCIS' PAPACY



On March 13, 2018 Jose Bergoglio celebrated his first five years as Pope. In retrospect, the memories that surface about his reign are numerous and momentous: his asking the people in St. Peter's Square to bless him before he gave them his first blessing; his responding to reporter's questions about gay priests by saying, "Who am I to judge?"; his three day visit to the U.S. that included his riveting speech to Congress; touring about in his tiny Fiat while visiting prisoners, nursing homes, and meal programs; his emphasis on "primacy of conscience" in the Synod documents, and both *Laudato Si* and *Amoris Latitiae*.

One could go on and on. This first Jesuit pope, taking the name of Francis of Assisi, revamping the Vatican finance and administrative branches, living in a simple apartment and dining with ordinary people – it is these life-style/ transparency choices that have endeared him to Catholics and non-Catholics around the world. In addition there is the continuing array of pictures, featuring his endearing smile, that appear on a regular basis in the news media.

For an 81 year old man, the pace he maintains and the travel he has logged (Chile, Peru, Myanmar, Bangladesh, U.S., Cuba, etc.) is, truly, mind-boggling.

Over the years there have, inevitably, been some negative moments (not to mention downright criticisms) of his words and actions by those who disagree with him: his handling of sexual abuse claims – most notably his persistent backing of Bishop Juan Barros in Chile; his open discussions at the Synod of bishops; his encouragement of national groups of bishops to send him proposal for ordaining married men; his willingness to consider revising church policies regarding divorced and remarried Catholics; and, currently, the possibility of working out a diplomatic solution between the Vatican and China.

I believe that the picture Pope Francis has given us of himself, one of a humble servant, helps to authenticate his presence as head of the Church. My wish is that he would take solid measures to include women in the ministry – which was the original plan of Vatican II. This remains the biggest hurdle for him to resolve. My best. Greg Zimmerman

Francis has done many wonderful things and written extensively in sermons and books. His finest achievement to me has been in changing the Roman Catholic conversation to a follow-up of Vatican II and the positive Christian mentality that the council engendered. His latest encyclical, "Amoris Laetitia," was a great addition to the Council's thinking. I would hope that Francis will tackle the woeful thinking on women and place them in their rightful position in the liturgy, governance, and leadership in the Church. It would correct a 'sinful stance' and a 'black eye' on his papacy. Bill McDonough

Perhaps the most persistent criticism of Francis, at least in the U.S., has been his unwavering stance against the ordination of women. The fact that he bases his argument on the somewhat shaky foundation that due to Pope John Paul II's statement against it in 1993 it is "settled theology" is a cause of dismay and discouragement for many segments of the Church – especially woman and younger members who are leaving in record numbers. This concern was echoed in comments made by many Corpus members:

"Francis is still a member of the 'old boys club' and has done essentially nothing for women. I'd like to see him ordain women priests." (Joe Bukovchik.)

It is interesting that "Jesuit-ness" is not something that arises often in the press coverage of his pontificate. A little mentioned fact, stated clearly in Austin Iverneigh's excellent book, "The Great Reformer," is that for over 20 years before he became pope Francis had little or no contact with his Jesuit brothers. The Wikipedia reference to this says that he was told not to enter Jesuit houses by no less than the General, Hans Peter Kolvenbach. Francis handled it expeditiously by going to the headquarters of the Jesuits for lunch the day after he came into office. (When he called the office and told the Brother that he was Pope Francis the fellow thought someone was pulling joke on him).

Pope Francis has had a boldly strategic effect on the institutional Church in making culture change a priority. . . . A path of love, Francis's evangelical goal, demands a holistic understanding and conscious effort toward faith—centered actions that create deeper, more intrinsic understanding of faith, not one based on rules or the values of the world. Janet Hauter.

"I love when he speaks or writes. I don't know how many times I've read the Joy of the Gospel or Laudato Si. To have the leader of the Church that so speaks to my heart – what a treasure – really. As for disappointments, the two very human issues that roil our church are women's leadership and the sex abuse scandal. I wish he would engage those two with the heart that he writes about and not as a political or structural issue." Sr. Simone Campbell, from Network.

"The best things of the pontificate so far would be, on the one hand, that the pope has managed to generate an interest for Christ's message in very many who are far from the church. On the other hand, he's generated an acute and necessary self-criticism towards those

of us are inside, but, above all, towards those who have important responsibilities of government, so that we live in a way that is consistent with what we believe.” Marilyu Espada, Spokesperson of the Diocese of Mexico City

“Allowing Laicized or otherwise “retired” priests into priestly ministry, at least to the point where the clergy are limited in number or over loaded.” Frank Manning

Diplomats in Rome, when asked if their governments take note when the pope speaks on a topic, say “And how.” Francis has 40 million followers on Twitter. And is the highest rated leader in the world.

Judy Andrews from New Mexico wrote “Francis’ best achievement: walking the walk. Paying his own bills, inviting the people to pray for him; living in the guest apartments; visiting the shelters; washing the feet of diverse community members, etc. One new action. Open a way for women to have a meaningful input in church decision making and governance.”

“Pope Francis: a humble, healing presence and a compassionate Champion for the Earth and its people.” Barbara L. Schultz

Among the many special media issues about Francis, the one published by America Magazine stands out: Pope Francis: Five Ground-Breaking Years

Mary McAleese: (Former president of Ireland, speaking at the Voices of Faith Conference in Rome -- held at the Jesuit Curia, after the Vatican threw them out): “The Church is one of the last great bastions of misogyny.” Link to talk: <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/34479>

By Jim Ewens