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Pope Francis

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Pope Francis

Photo by Giulio Napolitano

Honoring the impact of JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO

A Compassionate Heart, A Courageous Soul

BY GARY JANSEN

"The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely.

Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things."

— POPE FRANCIS

Imagine you had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis, to shake his hand, give him a gift, pose for a picture and speak with him for a couple of minutes. What would you tell him? What would you say?

If you're like me, you'd attempt to talk to him in a weird hybrid of Spanish and Italian (the Pope's preferred languages), give up after saying, "Hola, Papa Francesco," babble on in English about goodness knows what, nearly drop his gift in a puddle and then ask the Holy Father to pray for you — for his prayers to help you to see God in all things.

I don't have to imagine that scenario. This actually happened to me in late September 2014. As one of Pope Francis's U.S. editors,

I had the honor of presenting a special hardcover gift edition of his touchstone work, "The Joy of the Gospel." As a lifelong Catholic, this encounter with the charismatic "People's Pope" — a promoter of peace and a courageous advocate for social justice — was a dream come true. And though the pope merely nodded and smiled at me, responding to my earnest, bumbling request with a simple, "I will," nevertheless it was, for me, a deeply spiritual experience in which two people broke through a language barrier to speak clearly, one heart to another.

In the Beginning

"The grave danger is to disown our neighbors."

"The human heart desires joy." — POPE FRANCIS

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on December 17, 1936, to Italian parents who had settled in Argentina. Jorge grew up in a loving and devoutly Catholic family. His father was an accountant, his mother a housewife. He was close to his grandmother who taught him to pray and helped him accept and be open to people of other faiths and races. He enjoyed nature, soccer, basketball and even had a few girlfriends. His young life was much like yours and mine.

In his late teens, however, Jorge began to hear a calling to the priesthood. He delayed making a decision on what to do so he could finish his schooling. He worked as a bouncer at a nightclub while he continued his studies. In 1958, the pull of the Holy Spirit became undeniable, and he entered the Jesuit order. Over the years, he would continue his education while he served as a Jesuit priest. In the latter years of the 20th century, through political and economic uncertainty in his homeland, Jorge ministered in the shanty towns of Argentina. He was the beloved "slum bishop" to many.

With his ascension to the papacy in 2013, Jorge became the first South American ever to become pope. He earns praise for being a leader who focuses his attention on the plight of children and who has compassion for outcasts and the least fortunate among us. And while during his papacy Pope Francis met with gay rights activists, had lunch with transgender inmates, opened a free laundry for the homeless in Rome and washed the feet of Muslim refugees, he has also been criticized for not embracing same-sex marriage, not allowing women

to become priests and mishandling the sex-abuse scandals he inherited that have rocked the Catholic Church.

But all this was to come. During his formative years as a priest, his service to the poor set into motion the development of his signature spirituality of the heart.

Prayer of the Heart

"It is not possible to live without forgiveness."

"The Lord tells us: 'The first task in life is this: prayer.' But not the prayer of words, like a parrot; but the prayer of the heart: gazing on the Lord, hearing the Lord, asking the Lord." – POPE FRANCIS

Many of us have experienced the truth that when we change our thoughts we change our lives. Many of us believe in an infinite intelligence we can draw from for inspiration and strength, a force that can solve all our problems.

"True love is ... to accept those who are in need of our time, our friendship, our help."



Photo by Boris Stroujko

We have heard of the Godhead or the Divine Mind. Many of us believe that if we think the right way, we can grow rich materially and spiritually. Many of us practice mindfulness, trying to pay attention to our thoughts as they are now and living in the moment.

Yet Francis would caution that our intellect is only part of who we are. In fact, our thoughts can often get in the way of our hearts — and this can prevent us from helping those less fortunate. The heart, mystics believe, is the true center of our spiritual intelligence. A truly open heart is never wrong.

Pope Francis discerns the difference when, for example, he urges us to emulate the Virgin Mary, who when in the presence of a miracle didn't think it over in her mind but instead pondered it in her heart. The lesson here is that mindfulness is good, and coupled with heartfulness, it can lead to a powerful union of the head and the heart, ultimately leading to union with God.

Quotes featured in this article are from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development's compilation of excerpts from speeches, messages, homilies and audiences of Pope Francis.

"To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!"

— POPE FRANCIS, March 19, 2013

Photo by Giulio Napolitano



To help our hearts love more fully, feel more clearly and “burn with the charity of Jesus,” the pope suggests we do three things:

Seek. We must set aside our own concerns, politics and prejudices, and instead “seek out those in need.” Our job is not to be “an accountant of the Spirit,” meaning our role in life is not “you do something for me and I’ll do something for you.” Instead, we must seek out those who are hungry and hurting — people who are suffering physically, mentally and spiritually. We may not have solutions for what ails someone, but the gift of being present during a time of need is the first step in bringing a healing touch of heaven to earth.

Include. God “welcomes and includes everyone ... He stands apart from no one, but is always ready to dirty His hands” to help others. We should be ready to do the same.

Rejoice in prayer. When we pray, we realize “that nothing is more powerful than [God’s] love.” Acknowledging this we can “experience inner peace,” become “a channel of mercy” and “bring men and women closer to the heart of God.” The heart of God is infinite love, the transforming power that performs miracles and that leads to forgiveness, heals the sick and builds bridges to unify people of all races, genders and socioeconomic status. It is then that we can experience God and the saving power of mercy in all things.

Is all of this easier said than done? Perhaps. But Pope Francis stands firm that God always meets people where they are in their lives. We don’t have to be a nun, a priest or a monk to experience the heart of God. Busy mothers, fathers and students — all of us — can use the power of prayer to nurture the ability to see the divine in everything we do, even the seemingly menial tasks in our lives. When we look for God’s presence in all of these things, we are taking a first step toward praying with our hearts.

“Brothers and sisters, creation is not a possession that we can dispose of as we wish; much less is it the property of some, of only a few. Creation is a gift, it is a present, it is a marvelous gift given to us by God so that we might care for it and use it, always gratefully and always respectfully, for the benefit of everyone.” — POPE FRANCIS, October 28, 2014

We then begin to realize that we can find time to pray everywhere we are, while standing in line at the DMV or waiting for a prescription at a drugstore. When we find the sacred in everything, we become an embodiment of St. Paul's imperative to pray without ceasing.

Why is unceasing prayer important? Precisely because it opens a direct line of communication with God that allows for the perpetual exchange of inspiration and invigoration. It helps to connect us to the source of mercy and forgiveness so we too can become merciful and forgiving. It brings us strength and courage to address the conflicts and evils that we are living through today — poverty, fear, war, prejudice, slavery, child abuse, economic imbalance, gender inequality, xenophobia, environmental exploitation and global warming.

Prayer may not make us experts on politics or help us develop the business skills to create a nonprofit to help those in need, but it does help us wake up from the nightmares of modern history.

"In society today," Pope Francis writes in "The Joy of the Gospel," "we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own."

He reminds us that we are indeed our brothers' and sisters' keepers. What would the world be like if we all embraced this, not as an idea but as reality? Something like heaven on earth.

Pope Francis may not have all the answers, but he knows that if more and more of us become aware of the suffering around us — and learn the joy of serving rather than being served — we, too, will experience the burning, compassionate heart of God, which is pure love. May our hearts be set ablaze with that holy fire. ✚

*Let us know the absolute
power of prayer and
use it to heal our world.*



REFLECTIONS

Holding the Candle of Hope

REV. KATHLEEN LENOVER

As a sign of embracing a new identity, becoming a Sister of Charity required me to change my name. Kathy Lenover became Sister Russell Marie, S.C. It fascinated me when Regina and Mario Bergoglio's boy, Jorge, took the name of Francis, honoring St. Francis of Assisi. What a new identity to embrace.

Jorge started his spiritual quest under the influence of another spiritual giant, Ignatius of Loyola, the Basque nobleman who founded the Jesuits. As a member of the Society of Jesus, Jorge was steeped in an intellectual discipline that today, as Pope Francis, serves him well.

These four incredibly impactful beings — Regina, Mario, Francis and Ignatius — must be proud of His Holiness's simplicity, authenticity and honesty. Popes are such aloof figures that one gets to make up what might be true about them. Francis let the world glimpse his humanness and his divinity early on. I knew I liked him from the beginning.

It is my prayer that Pope Francis continues to lead the Roman Catholic Church with his emphasis on loving the poor and using dialogue to build bridges between people of all faiths. I pray he has a dramatic impact on the church's compassion regarding inclusivity of women in the clergy, respect for the LGBTQ communities around the world and the healthy marital state of priests. His work is huge, and I have great hope in this giant of a man. ☕

"It is a well-known fact that current levels of production are sufficient, yet millions of people are still suffering and dying of starvation. This, dear friends, is truly scandalous. A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being." — POPE FRANCIS, June 20, 2013



Art by Thoom

Christ Is Born in Us Today

ERNEST HOLMES

Today, we are celebrating the birth of the child Jesus, whose destiny it was to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand. As we think back to that historic time, when shepherds watched their flocks by night, "all seated on the ground and angels of the Lord came down and glory shone around," how beautiful it is to think of angels as God's messengers to us, winging, as it were, news from the Kingdom of Heaven, bringing with them that glorious light which we always associate with our thought of the Spirit.

Perhaps in this beautiful story, so full of meaning to all of us, the shepherds who watched their flocks might be thought of as representing our attitudes of humbly listening to, and waiting for, the guidance of Divine love and wisdom. God always peoples the lonely places with His presence, as He does all other places.

As the shepherds watched their flocks, and in innocence and peace tended the humble duties which Life imposes upon all of us, as they went quietly about their work, or sat in silent meditation, thinking

of the wonders of the universe and reverently bowing their heads in prayerful communion with the everlasting Presence, the angels of light appeared unto them and glory shone around.

Suppose we were to think of this as a grouping of beautiful word pictures meant to represent those experiences which we all have as we search for the meaning of life and try to draw ever closer to the Divine Presence which fills all space. Surely the shepherds were setting up what Emerson called "a lowly listening." They were listening to nature and to nature's God. They were opening up their intuition, that divine thing which This Thing Called Life has implanted in all of us, which is the presence of God not only around, but also within.

Good Will for Our World

It was during this thoughtful, reverent atmosphere of faith and childlike expectation that angels appeared unto them, clothed in light. Perhaps the angels of God's presence are evermore around all of us, waiting with their message of hope and cheer to enter our minds, to still our fears, and to sing for us the glorious tidings of good cheer, telling us to fear not, "For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior which is Christ the Lord. And ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

"And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men." Don't you think this means that when we are waiting on the Divine Presence and listening to the voice of intuition, we come into a consciousness of peace and a realization that we all belong to one human family?

For surely God desires peace on earth and good will among men, and Christmas is the day of good will among men. It is a day when we find a common cause and gladly make our gifts of love to each other in the spirit of him who said, "Love one another. ... It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

Today, as our thought ascends in prayer, our good will is going out to the whole world. Today our great desire is that peace and good will shall come among all people and all nations, binding all together in golden chains of love.

The holy babe of Bethlehem, whose birth we commemorate today with love and gifts, with good cheer and joyful tidings, later grew into a man of divine stature, and did he not tell us to let our light shine, to continually proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand?

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How sweet and simple is the thought of the shepherds watching their flocks by night, when in the silence of their holy communion they received the good tidings of great joy. How wonderful to think of these simple folk who didn't question the divine event.

They didn't argue among themselves, saying: Is it too good to be true? or, Is it only a dream? Rather, they embraced each other and immediately went out to spread the good news — the greatest news that ever came to the world — [of] peace on earth and good will among men, and love one another, for God is love.

Following the Sacred Star

In the same story we are told that at the same time, the Wise Men of the East, the Magi, also received the glad tidings on the divine birth and hastened to go to the babe.

For generations it had been prophesied that such a child was to be born. The Wise Men of the East represent the intellect which goes in search after truth, that intelligence in all of us which knows that God is not afar off that something within us which feels, with a feeling deep as life itself, that the holy babe of Bethlehem ought to be born in each one of us anew.

And so the Wise Men followed a star that rose in the east. No doubt this represents the rising of the sun, a new day of hope, when light comes to the Earth and the warmth and radiance of the sun bring forth a new seed time and a new harvest.

And the Wise Men followed their intuition, led of God, until they too came to the manger where the little child lay. Beholding the babe cradled in the arms of mother love, and seeing the light of heaven, they fell down and worshipped. And just as we do today, they presented their gifts, the most precious in their possession — gold, frankincense and myrrh.

We often speak of “a heart of gold” or of “pure gold.” It was this purity of the heart that they laid before the altar of their adoration. The frankincense and myrrh, the sweet-smelling herbs which were used as incense,

The Wise Men represent the necessity that the intellect as well as the heart should recognize the presence of God in and through everything.



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represent beauty added to purity, spoken of in the Bible as the beauty of holiness. For there is beauty as well as holiness in divine worship. How could it be otherwise since divine worship is always an entering into communion with the Spirit which is ever around us?

There are two significant things about this story of the shepherds and the Wise Men who came to adore the newborn babe. For while the shepherds represent the intuition and feeling, the Wise Men represent the necessity that the intellect as well as the heart should recognize the presence of God in and through everything. As wonderful as the intellect is, it, too, must join with the heart. Life is a combination of know-how and know-what. The know-what is a thing of feeling; it is born with us. This is the child, the babe in the manger of our own consciousness. The know-how is our attempt to uncover the secrets of nature and unlock the power stored at the center of everything.

We might even call them faith and science — the know-how and the know-what — the feeling and the intellect, the heart and the mind. We must bring all that we have if we, too, are to see the light from heaven and hear the angelic voices and feel the glory and the power which belong to God's kingdom.

Today, as never before, the world needs good news. It needs the heavenly light. It needs a star to guide it. It needs an understanding heart and the protecting power of divine guidance. We are all shepherds tending our little flocks, and we hope that we are also wise men following the star of the East to where the little child lies.

Shall we not remember this ageless story and seek to apply it to our everyday living? Should not Christ be born in us today? If we permit this divine incarnation to take place, shall we not also feel the presence of angelic forces and listen to that celestial song, the song of the ages: "Peace on earth and good will among men"?

Meditation from Dr. Ernest Holmes

Let us take as our thought for today: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men." Prayer and meditation are for the purpose of consciously entering into communion with the Spirit of all life with a power and a presence that fill all space, that flows through everything and is at the very center of our own being.

Prayer and meditation connect our thought and mind with the Giver of all good, with the essence of all life, with the power that can do anything, and with that love and peace which we know God must

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be. Let us, then, shut every other thought out of the mind for a few moments as we listen, quietly, reverently, peacefully and with complete acceptance.

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth and good will toward men.” We, too, glorify the Divine Presence. We are lifting up both mind and heart to the influx of the Divine Spirit. As we do this, peace and good flow through us and out to all men.

It is our sincere desire that the heavenly light shall guide us, as it did the Wise Men of old, to the place where the heavenly child is to be born in us today. Reverently, we bow before this divine incarnation. Silently we offer our gifts of love and adoration to the Presence within and around us, to our dear ones and friends, and to the whole world.

May the angels of the Lord proclaim, anew, to us the good tidings of great joy.

*“O holy Child of Bethlehem, / Descend in us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in; / Be born in us today!” ❀*



This excerpt is in the public domain. The rest of this article (as well as four others in the series on “Pray and Prosper”) is available at **SoMArchives.org** along with many other free and low-cost spiritual treasures. Go to “Quick Links” on the right sidebar on the home page and click on the current issue of this magazine.

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Our Christmas Invitation

Here we are, beloveds. Another Christmas season upon us, another opportunity to reflect and cultivate the sacred divinity within our own souls. No doubt, wherever you are reading this, you are surrounded by decorations and signs of the season. I'll admit, sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming, especially when the artificial Christmas trees show up in the stores before Halloween. My reaction is usually, "Hey, I'm not ready for that!"

In this month's article, Dr. Ernest Holmes poses an interesting idea to us all: "Suppose we were to think of this as a grouping of beautiful word pictures meant to represent those experiences which we all have as we search for the meaning of life and try to draw ever closer to the Divine Presence which fills all space."

In other words, what if we take on the Christmas stories as an invitation to our own awakening? That would be pretty fantastic, right? Angels, shepherds, Wise Men from the East — all representing aspects of our own soul's awaking to the highest divine potential that lives within all creation. That certainly is a metaphysical and New Thought way of looking at this thing called Christmas.

Let me take it one step further. What if that was the intention of the authors of these stories all along? What if everything surrounding the birth narrative of the man Jesus was a metaphorical story, specifically chosen to awaken within the reader a sense of divinity?

Does that not correspond with Jesus's own teaching about our ability to heal, use our consciousness and awaken to the nearness of the kingdom as an inner reality? Maybe that is the Christ we need to put back in Christmas — the mystical, cosmic and universal Christ Consciousness that lives as a nestled seed of divine potential within us all.

If you and I really took on this task — waking up to our oneness, our true power and our limitless possibility — would that not be the greatest gift we could give to humanity? Aren't you ready for that? I know I am. *Travel well.* ❀



**REV. DR.
DAVID
ALEXANDER**

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The High Watch of Oneness

The Creative Force of the universe is Infinite Good and Eternal Oneness. It is ever-present Truth, consistently expressing Its ongoing love and grace throughout the universe. This Power is undeniably present throughout the realms of the formless as well as the realms of form. This is the most high, First Cause to all expression.

Oneness is the Source of all, which must include me. I am an individualization of this Oneness moving through me as spirit, mind and body. My life is completely one with all that is. I recognize and hold sacred this truth. I have faith and trust in this one Source as my life.

At this time of year, when the light appears most ephemeral and oblique, I consciously choose to keep the high watch of oneness first and foremost in my mind and heart, and in that, I am aware of my immediate and total oneness with the One True Light. From this alignment with the most high, I know there is, and can be, no opposition to my Good. I am continually guided to an ever-greater expression of wisdom and love.

I live in a state of awareness of my life from this place of the high watch, and I see and celebrate my spiritually discerned health, wealth, love and creative self-expression. The Light I know illumines my ever-expanding peace, perfection and beauty.

I accept my part in the universe. I accept oneness as my prism and lens through which I see and experience all of life, the inner and the outer. My consciousness is continually aware of Good expanding and multiplying throughout the cosmos, throughout all expressions of the One.

I am in deep, powerful gratitude for this perspective of the high watch and appreciative for its manifestations. I am profoundly grateful for this and for all that comes from it.

I surrender these words of the high to the High with trust, release and faith that they are so. **And so it is.** ☸

Rev. Dr. Deborah Gordon is the co-founder of Centre for Spiritual Living Kelowna, British Columbia, with her husband Rev. Dr. Kenn Gordon. Visit CSLKelowna.org for more information.

Forget the Destination



HOLLY DUCKWORTH, RScP,

is a trail-blazing speaker, executive coach and practitioner. She works with today's leaders to reduce pressure in uncertain times. With spiritual practice and mindfulness experiences, her clients manifest profits, peace and presence.

Are you ready to receive? When I entered practitioner training years ago, we used this question as a way to remember the first letters of the five steps of Religious Science prayer (or spiritual mind treatment). The five are recognize, unify, realize, thanksgiving and release. The question reminds us to make welcome what we want on our journey. In our prayer work, we learn over and over to surrender the destination and accept the journey.

Leadership today is the empowered walk into the human experience of the unknown, coupled with the paradox of certainty of the known as a spiritual being. The intersection of leadership and spirituality is the daily practice of visiting our Spirit within, then living and leading from its courageous, centered and grounded messages for our businesses and lives. When we began 2017, did you set an intention for the year, make a vision board or business plan? How did you do? Were you ready to receive God in the forms you declared? My 2017 word of intention was *receptivity*. My 2017 affirmation was, "I receive with ease." I will be honest: I lost track of the word and the affirmation many times this year, yet Spirit provided both through my daily journey.

Mindful leadership in these transformational times means allowing God to move through us. It is making a courageous commitment to the journey, no matter where it takes us. This year has taken us many places as a conscious community of human beings. The world has talked money, health care, global issues, immigration, diversity, education

and environment. All of these conversations are a call to hold true to the highest faith that God, by all names, is in the middle of the journey and resolving the highest good for all. Dr. Ernest Holmes reminds us to love and love the entirety of the experience. As we wrap up 2017, are there moments you didn't love? Go back now and shower them in love.

- **Recognize** love in all people and situations you encounter.
- **Unify** yourself, centered in the place where love always shows up.
- **Realize** that where you put your love, more love will grow.
- **Thank God** for absolutely everything in your experience.
- **Release** attachment, breathe in faith. The God within you guides.

Cheers to accepting an amazing 2017 and cocreating a love- and light-filled 2018. Lead with love, and you lead the journey. ☘

Give Yourself the Greatest Gift



DR. TERRY COLE- WHITTAKER

received her Religious Science ordination in 1975 and was honored with a Doctorate of Humane Letters in 2009.

The greatest gift you can receive is the gift you give to yourself — the gift of the self back to the self. Take back your compassion. Take back your generosity. Take back your strength, intuition and creative abilities. Take back all your divine, eternal powers, qualities and abilities that are already included within each of us as Spirit souls.

There is no evolution for us because we are whole, complete and perfect sparks of the Divine; however, there is devolution, the forgetting of who we are as these emanations of the Supreme Being and possessing all that our Source is and has. We are also able to receive from our Divine Reservoir all that is needed in each moment. For some, this seems too good to be true, so they fall for lies that proclaim that we are only this temporary physical body, running after morsels to gratify the senses until we die.

There is something really wrong with this scenario. Whatever got us to this moment, we could argue about, discuss relentlessly, find who's to blame, suffer over it endlessly, etc., but the fact remains that each of us is always right here, now, regardless of how many bodies we have incarnated in since the beginning of the concept of time, regardless of the experiences we have had.

What now? Each new moment is an opportunity to set our desired reality in motion instead of believing any fear-, guilt- or poverty-based thoughts, regardless of who is broadcasting these type of concepts.

This is the beauty and gift of a new life, instantly. Why drag all the baggage we have been carrying — as if all the stories and such are who we are — when these are just our narratives, but not *truly us*.

Start fresh in every moment of now. Why live in the future of a dream or the past of what was and is gone when all is possible right now?

Cast off the layers of ignorance that have obscured our divine vision and knowingness of who we are and our unlimited abilities.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Live so that others may live." Cast aside all cruel actions toward yourself and others, including all animals, and live eternally immersed in the pleasure of your soul.

The real joy is in the giving. ❀



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