

The Francis Effect

Advent Programme 2014

Week 1 | Surprise

Discussion Questions

The historic resignation of Pope Benedict XVI raised significant questions about the role and structure of the papacy today. Consequently, few predicted the election of the 76-year-old Argentinian Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

1. What was your reaction to Benedict's resignation? What can the Church learn from this humble, yet revolutionary gesture?
2. What effect did the unique context of the papal transition have on the Conclave?
3. What surprised you about the election of Cardinal Bergoglio?
4. What do you remember about the night of the election and the first weeks of his pontificate?

The office and ministry of the Pope is one of the oldest and most symbolic leadership positions in the world. His official titles include: Vicar of Christ, Supreme Pontiff, Successor of Peter, and Servant of the Servants of God. One of the oldest titles is Bishop of Rome, which Francis emphasised in his address to the world on the night of his election.

1. What is the proper role of the Pope in the Church?
2. What is the significance of Francis' emphasis on the ancient title - Bishop of Rome?

3. What is the significance of the first Latin American Pope? The first Jesuit Pope? The first Pope named Francis?

Lectio Divina

John 13:1-15

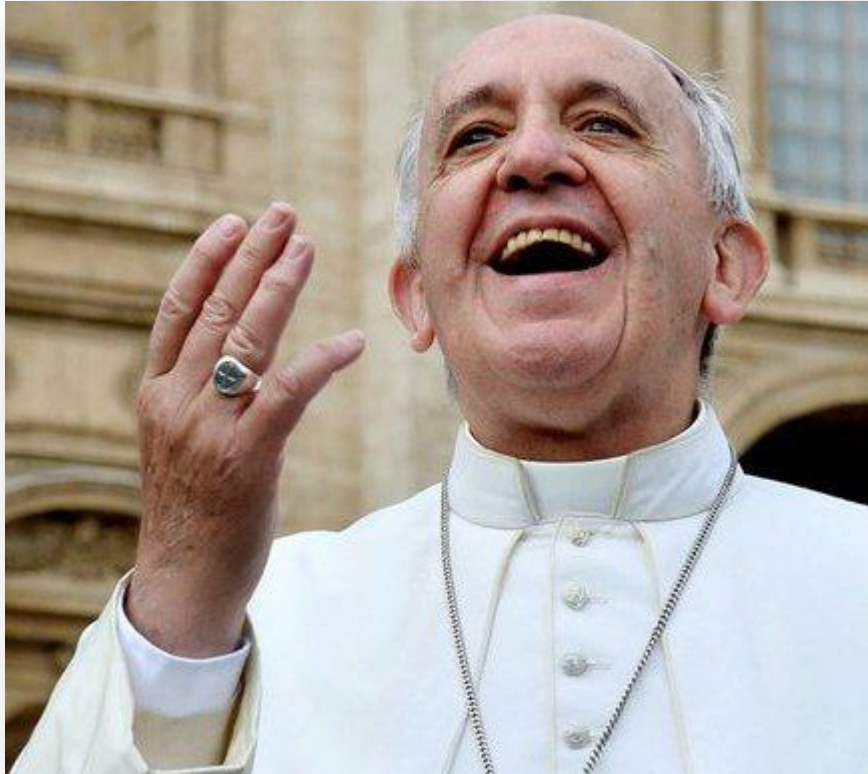
Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me". Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me

Teacher and Lord- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Questions

1. What was your reaction to Francis washing the feet of the young prisoners, including Muslims and women, during his first Holy Thursday celebration as Pope?
2. Whose feet are we called to wash as individuals? As a community?

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Week 2 | A new way of communicating

Discussion Questions

Francis is communicating in new ways by making himself available to people and using language everyone can understand, e.g. his morning homilies in the Domus Sactae Marthae Chapel. He has also done many interviews that have attracted attention from the secular media.

1. What are the benefits of these methods of communication? What are the challenges?
2. What is the central message of Pope Francis? How is he communicating it?
3. What lessons can be learned about evangelization from the Pope's methods of communication?
4. How would you assess the secular media's coverage of Pope Francis?
5. Why do some people have difficulty with Francis' 'understanding of mercy'?

Lectio Divina

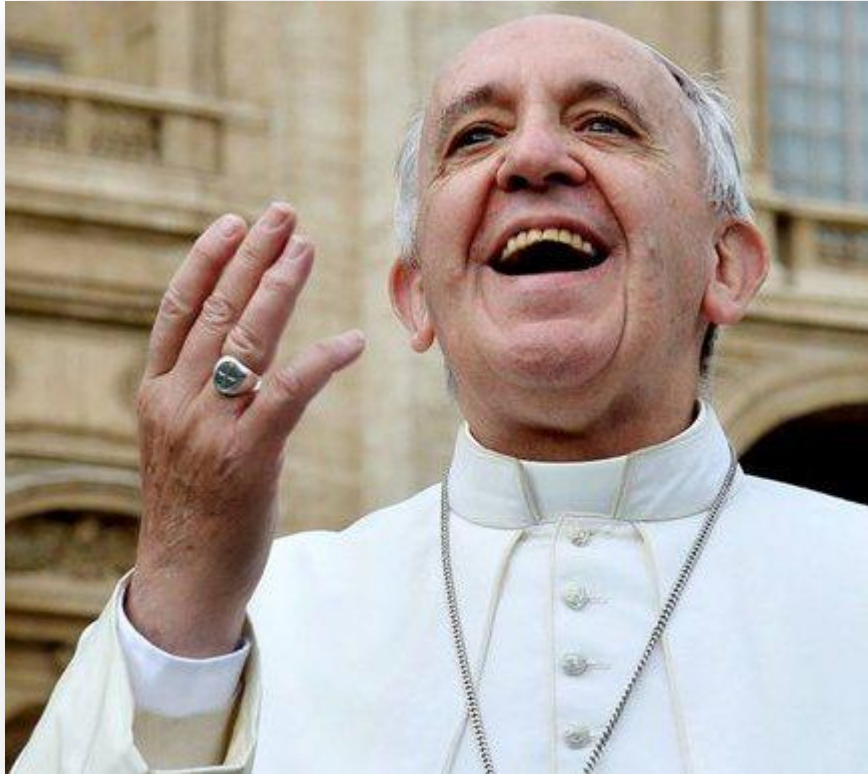
John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Questions

1. How does Jesus respond to the demands of the Law to stone the woman? What does he teach us about the relationship between the Law and pastoral ministry?
2. Who are the people caught in adultery today? How do we respond to their need for mercy and forgiveness?

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Week 3 | The blue print

Discussion Questions

Evangelii Gaudium is the blueprint for Pope Francis' pontificate. Among other topics he discusses extensively: the reform of the Church's missionary outreach; temptations faced by pastoral workers; the Church as the People of God which evangelizes the homily and is preparation; the inclusion of the poor in society; peace and dialogue in society; the spiritual motivations for mission.

1. What is significant about the vision, style and pastoral experience of Pope Francis becoming part of the Magisterium of the Church?
2. What is the central message of *Evangelii Gaudium*?

In the first chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes that some revealed truths are more importance for giving direct expression to the heart of the Gospel, i.e. the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.

1. Why is it important to begin evangelization from the heart of the Gospel?
2. What does this reorientation of priorities and the Pope's strong pastoral sense mean for the Church at the local and global levels?
3. What is the role of joy in evangelization?

4. What can we do to implement parts of *Evangelii Gaudium* in our community?

Lectio Divina

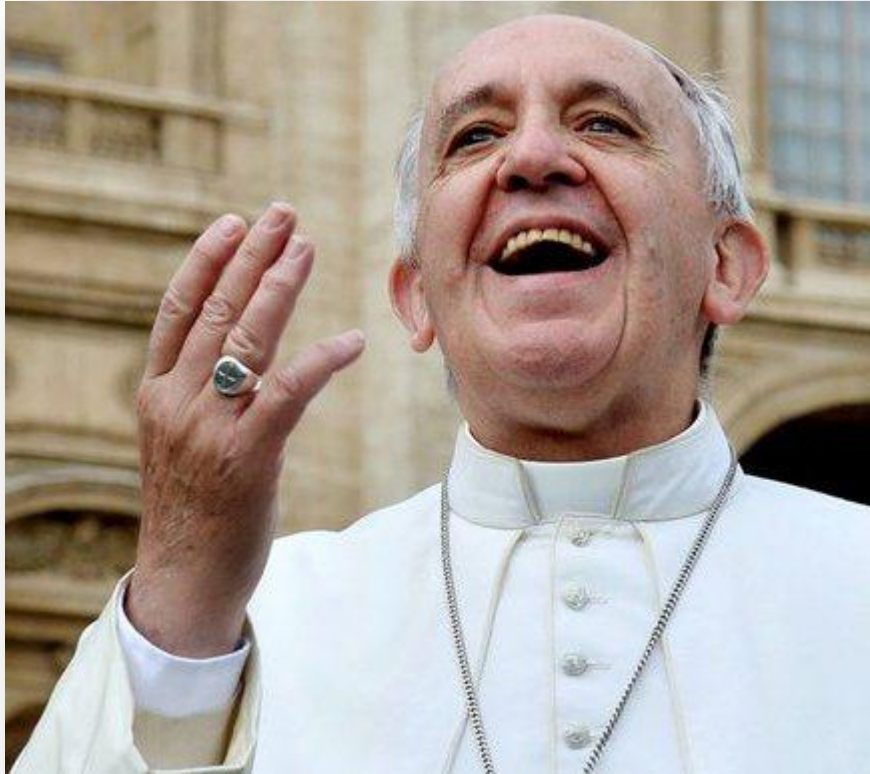
Mark 4:26-29

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

Questions

1. Do we accept the unpredictable power and freedom of the word of God?
2. How do I personally, and we as a community, hinder the growth of the work in the lives of others and in the greater society? How do we contribute to it?

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Week 4 | Reaching the peripheries

Discussion Questions

The prevailing economic outlook has led to worldwide instability and inequitable living conditions for hundreds of millions of people. "A globalisation on indifference" thus developed, according to Pope Francis.

1. What does Francis mean by "globalisation of indifference?"
2. What is Francis' critique of unfettered capitalism?
3. What does it mean to be "a Church which is poor and for the poor?"
4. Who are the people on the periphery of our community? How can we include them?

In a short period of time, Pope Francis has become the most credible moral voice in the world.

1. What do Christians and non-Christians see in Pope Francis that makes this message credible?
2. What is the role of the Pope in global politics? How has Francis used his moral voice to pursue peace and dialogue?
3. What is the role of prayer in the ongoing transformation of the world? How does our community pray and work towards this transformation.

Lectio Divina

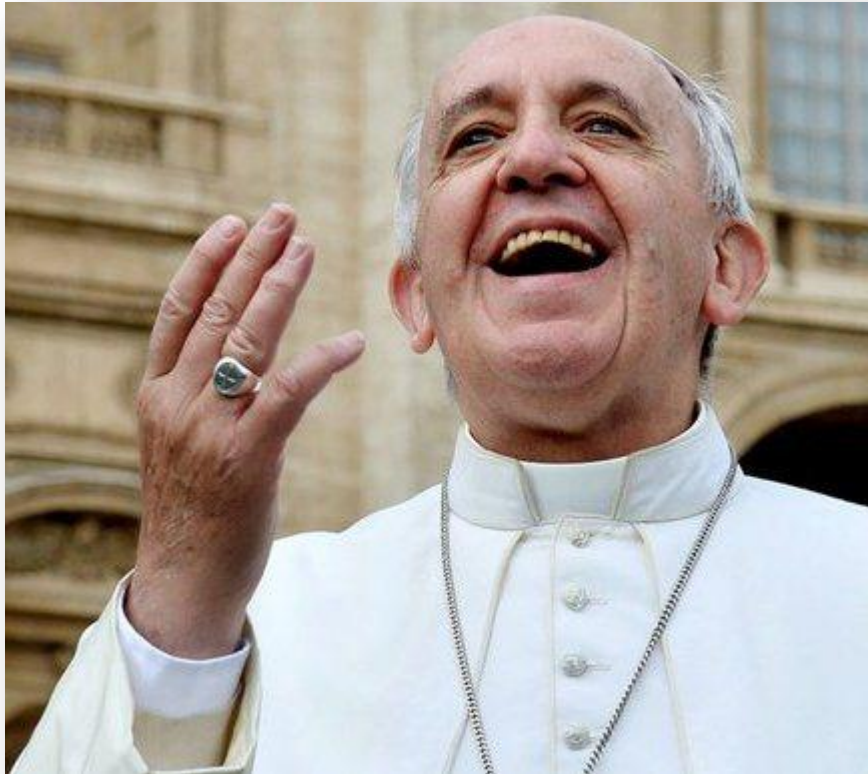
Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Questions

1. What place do sinners and those on the margins of society have in the ministry of Jesus?
2. What does it mean to believe in a God who "desires mercy, not sacrifice?"

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Week 5 | A reforming Mandate

Discussion Questions

Pope Francis' first order of business was to create a council of eight cardinals to assist him in reforming the Vatican bureaucracy.

1. What do the Pope and Cardinals hope to accomplish by reforming the Church's central government? What are their biggest challenges?
2. What does the term "collegiality" mean in the Church? How is Francis promoting it? What is the danger of excessive centralisation of authority in the Church?

Francis has stressed the importance of pastoral conversion for all Catholics in order to effectively evangelize today.

1. What are the dangers posed by:
 - Making the Gospel message an ideology
 - Functionalism
 - ClericalismHow can we avoid these dangers as a community?
2. Francis has said that evangelizers must take on "the smell of the sheep". What does this mean for bishops? For priests? For lay people?

Lectio Divina

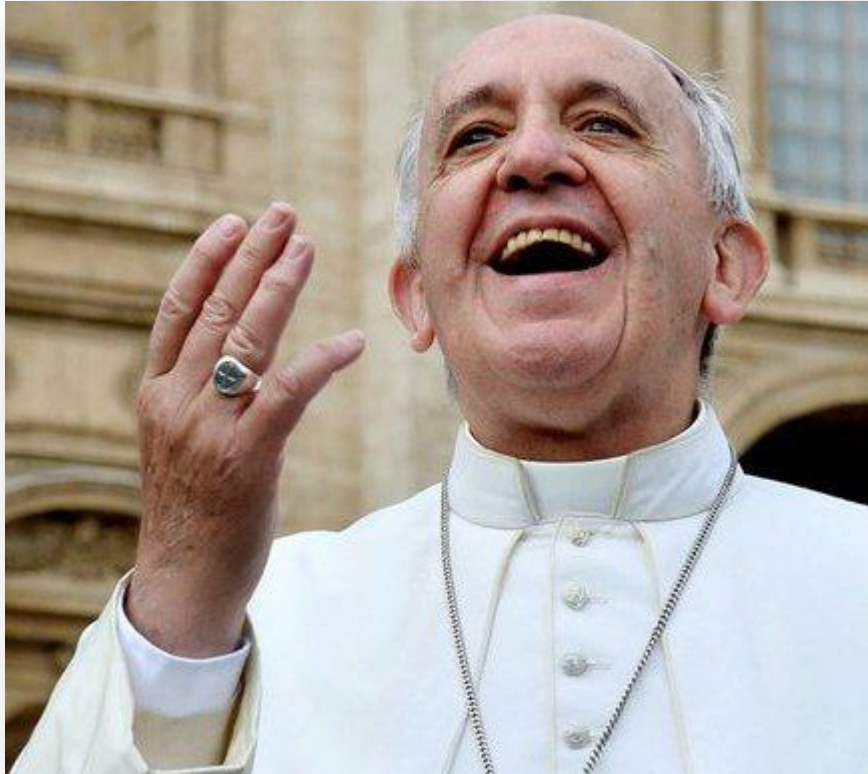
Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Questions

1. How does Jesus define leadership and authority? What implications does this have for the Church?
2. How do I exercise authority over others in my life? In my ministry?

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Week 6 | Style or substance

Discussion Questions

The Second Vatican Council brought the Church up to date by promoting dialogue, internal reform and Gospel simplicity. Francis, in many ways, is seen as a Pope of the Council.

1. How does Francis embody the teachings of the Council in his ministry?
2. Does Francis, like the Council before him, represent a change in style or substance?
3. What does it mean to say "style is substance"?
4. What is the underlying fear of some Catholics who are disturbed by how Francis is exercising his ministry? What is the Church's response to these members of the community?

Lectio Divina

Luke 12:54-56

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Questions

1. What does it mean to read the signs of the times?
2. How do I interpret what is happening in the Church today? How do I respond in my own life? How do we respond as a community?

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