

Catholic

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SEVEN LESSONS FROM POPE FRANCIS

He invites us to join him in “walking the talk” of our faith. His words and actions inspire us to a simple and faithful following of Christ. *By Joan McKamey*



CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARRIS

What do a first-century Jew, a 13th-century Italian, and a 21st-century Argentinean have in common? When they're Jesus of Nazareth, Francis of Assisi, and Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis), the unity of their message outshines differences of culture and time. By choosing the name Francis, our new pope points to

St. Francis as a model of Gospel living. He says, "For me, [St. Francis] is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation." St. Francis, in turn, points to Jesus who said, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Let's look at seven lessons from Pope Francis' first year and consider how his actions challenge us to live more fully as Jesus' disciples.

1. LISTEN (PRAY)

Pope Francis' first public words were "Let us always pray for one another. . . . Let us pray for the whole world. . . . I ask that you would pray to the Lord to bless me."

Pope Francis starts each day as he began his papacy, with prayer. He says, "I pray the breviary [Liturgy of the Hours] every morning. I like to pray with the psalms. Then, later, I celebrate Mass. I pray the rosary. What I really prefer is adoration in the evening, even when I get distracted and think of other things, or even fall asleep praying. . . . I stay in front of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour in adoration. I pray mentally even when I am waiting at the dentist or at other times of the day. . . . I ask myself: *What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?*"

Reflect: Do I listen in prayer? How can I fit prayer into my daily routine?

2. SIMPLIFY

Much like his namesake, Pope Francis has chosen a simple lifestyle. When serving as cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires, he took the bus or subway and lived in a simple apartment. As pope, he uses a "scuffed-up Ford Focus" and wears a simple white cassock. His suspension of a German bishop overseeing a \$42.5 million church residence renovation (including a \$20,500 bathtub!) indicates an expectation that Church leaders spend responsibly.

Pope Francis chooses to live in the Vatican guesthouse, explaining, "I need a community. . . . I need to live my life with others." Clearly, people are more important to him than



CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARING

the additional space and privacy the papal apartment offers, and he views material possessions as fleeting.

Reflect: How might I live more simply?

3. REFOCUS

Pope Francis invites us to think more broadly. He responded, "Who am I to judge?" to a question about homosexuality. "If a homosexual person is of good will and is in search of God, I am no one to judge." Some thought he was suggesting a change in Church teaching. Instead, he says, "The teaching of the Church is clear, and I am a son of the Church, but it is not necessary to talk about those issues [i.e., women priests, abortion, divorce, gay marriage, contraception] all the time. . . . The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you."

Calling for "mercy above all," he speaks of his own sinfulness and says, "I'm drawn to prisoners; I'm human like they are." He washed the feet of 12 prison inmates (including two women and two Muslims) on Holy

Thursday, celebrated Mass with hosts made by Argentine prisoners, and met with prisoners in Sardinia and Rio. Referring to the Church as a "field hospital" where people come for merciful care, he tells priests to lead with the merciful face of Christ. Without moving the line between right and wrong, Pope Francis invites us to hold our judgment in favor of sharing God's mercy.

Reflect: What judgments keep me from being merciful in thought, word, or action?

DIG DEEPER

Which action by Pope Francis has touched you the most?

How do Pope Francis' words and actions challenge you?

What one thing can you do this month to follow Pope Francis' lead?

4. ENGAGE

Pope Francis engages the world with his genuine smile, humble spirit, and desire to rub elbows with us. While busy leading the Church, he makes time for the people who make up the Church. We see him posing for a selfie with visitors to the Vatican and inviting a teen with Down syndrome to ride on the popemobile. When caught in a traffic jam en route to a World Youth Day event, he opened his window and greeted people on the crowded street. He says, "I manage to look at individual persons, one at a time, to enter into personal contact with whomever I have in front of me."



CNS PHOTO/CLAUDIO PERI, EPA

The archbishop who heads the Vatican agency for handing out alms says Pope Francis told him, "You can sell your desk. You don't need it. . . . You need to go out and look for the poor." The archbishop explains, "This is the concept: be with people and share their lives, even for 15, 30 minutes, an hour." He tells how Pope Francis, as cardinal,

"would go out at night in Buenos Aires, not just to find people, talk with them, or buy them something to eat. . . . He would eat with them. . . . This is what he wants from me."

And us.

Reflect: Do I make time for the people I encounter each day? How can I seek out the needy?

5. EMBRACE

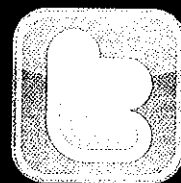
We will long remember the image of Pope Francis embracing the man with the disfigured face. His tweets are often prayers or invitations: "Lord, teach us to step outside ourselves."

"Teach us to go out into the streets and manifest your love."

"True charity requires courage: let us overcome the fear of getting our hands dirty so as to help those in need."

As his namesake embraced a leper, so Pope Francis reaches beyond appearances to touch hearts. He says, "We must always

POPE FRANCIS ON TWITTER



- Do not be content to live a mediocre Christian life: walk with determination along the path of holiness.
- Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality.
- If we wish to follow Christ closely, we cannot choose an easy, quiet life. It will be a demanding life, but full of joy.
- The measure of greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty.
- The only war that we must all fight is the one against evil.
- To be saints is not a privilege for the few, but a vocation for everyone.
- The love of God is not generic. God looks with love upon every man and woman, calling them by name.
- Let us pray that God grant us the grace of knowing a world where no one dies of hunger.

Follow the pope's tweets: @Pontifex

WORLD YOUTH DAY, BRAZIL, JULY 2013

"Christians cannot be pessimists! They do not look like someone in constant mourning. If we are truly in love with Christ and if we sense how much he loves us, our heart will 'light up' with a joy that spreads to everyone around us."

"The culture of selfishness and individualism that often prevails in our society is not, I repeat, not what builds up and leads to a more habitable world: rather, it is the culture of solidarity that does so; the culture of solidarity means seeing others not as rivals or statistics, but brothers and sisters."

"I ask you . . . to be revolutionaries, to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes that you are incapable of responsibility, that you are incapable of true love."

consider the person.... In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy."

Reflect: What fears must I overcome to become merciful?



CNS PHOTO/LOSSEVATORE ROMANO VIA REUTERS

7. REJOICE!

Pope Francis is appealing in part because he's human like us. He spends no time on a pedestal, preferring instead to reach out to those in the gutters. He takes his responsibility as a child of God, disciple of Christ, and leader

6. CHALLENGE

While Pope Francis draws positive attention and press, he's not afraid to challenge the status quo. He's initiated a reform of the Roman Curia and an investigation of the Vatican bank. He's named a new commission on clergy sex abuse, shifting the focus from legal challenges to prevention of abuse and the pastoral care of victims and their families. He says the Church must strip itself of vanity, arrogance, and pride.

Social structures outside the Church haven't escaped his scrutiny. He criticizes capitalism and globalization for contributing to a widening divide between the "haves" and "have-nots." He asks, "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?" He says of his position, "The pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike... he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect, and promote the poor."

He accepts his own and the Church's responsibility to work "to eliminate the structural causes of poverty." But poverty isn't his only concern. He has held a prayer vigil for peace, called for a day of fasting, and begged world leaders for peaceful resolution of conflict in Syria. He has posed with environmental activists, calling business leaders and politicians to be "protectors of creation." He speaks out for matters of justice and challenges us to do the same.

Reflect: How might I work to combat injustices in my community, nation, world?

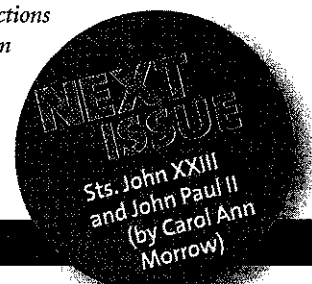
of the Catholic Church seriously, yet he finds joy in being human and sharing real-life moments with others. In his apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," he writes, "One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, sourpusses."

Pope Francis is no sourpuss! He embraces the joys and surprises of life, much like the young boy who joined him onstage, hugged his leg, and then sat in his chair. Pope Francis strives for "perfect love" that "drives out fear" (1 Jn 4:18) and "would rather trust God than live in a bulletproof bubble."

Reflect: Am I a sourpuss? Where am I called to seek and spread joy?

Explaining *Time* magazine's choice of Pope Francis as 2013 Person of the Year, Nancy Gibbs writes: "In a very short time, a vast, global, ecumenical audience has shown a hunger to follow him." He is "pulling the papacy out of the palace and into the streets," she says, "committing the world's largest church to confronting its deepest needs, and balancing judgment with mercy." We will do well to follow his lead.

Joan McKamey is the editor of Catholic Update. She eagerly follows the words and actions of Pope Francis and finds inspiration in his commitment to following Christ.



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