



Pope Francis washes the kisses the feet of youth on prison visit
Holy Thursday

He took the name Francis, but...

Gustavo M. González, C.M.

Province of Argentina

When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John". But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name". So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name", and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God (Luke 1:59-63).

"White Smoke" were two words that interrupted my daily activity. I rushed to finish what I was doing, and then I sat in front of the television to wait for the time of the announcement: to see and hear who had been chosen to fill the chair of Peter.

During the run-up to the conclave, the local media highlighted candidates coming from the various continents. We dreamed of a pope

from Latin America, and in fact, there were candidates named as possible "Papabile" from Latin America. In Argentina, we had our own candidate, but he was not a name considered to be well-known by experts worldwide. Ours was a desire, a dream, and we knew it was just that.

One day I heard an international Vatican expert (whose name I cannot recall), discussing a list of possible papal candidates which included the Argentine Cardinal. I thought to myself: "What a crazy idea to think it could be Bergoglio!". Then, the 'expert' said, "It is possible, but I do not think so... the Church needs someone younger". That, at least, was what the 'expert in the field' said, and when he was finished I believe that I also agreed with his opinion.

Suddenly, television cameras were fixed on the loggia of St. Peter's: the big curtains and the window opened. Cardinal Tauran uttered the first words in Latin: "*Vobis Gaudium Annuntio magnum; Habemus Papam*". "I bring you news of great joy: we have a Pope!". The cry in the Piazza of St. Peter's was enormous as many pilgrims gathered from all over the world, and I found myself caught up in this joy and excitement. But as Cardinal Tauran continued in Latin: "*Hac Reverendissimum Eminentissimum Dominum, Dominum Romanae Georgium Ecclesiae Sanctae Marium qui sibi nomen Cardinalem imposuit Bergoglio Franciscum*". "Bergoglio?... I said it out loud again... Bergoglio?". As I sat there amazed, and like most of my Argentine countrymen, my thoughts and words were mixed with much excitement, joy, and tears.

I stood in front of the TV, taking in all that was being reported. Suddenly, I thought to myself, "With all this news, what am I doing staying here? I'm going to the Cathedral. Our local Bishop was chosen from among the 115 cardinals to be the next Pope!". I guess the 'experts' are feeling a little humiliated tonight! The winds of the Holy Spirit reached far beyond any direction the media thought possible. One journalist would later admit that "In all of this, I think we had forgotten the supernatural factor".

On my way to the Cathedral, the joy in the streets was indescribable. People smiled with a certain familiarity. The Cathedral, little by little, filled up, and we constantly heard people praying, cheering, and applauding. There were people hugging, laughing, and talking on phones to share the news with their loved ones. It was a night of filled with excitement and joy

There are so many similar things being written and said repeatedly about Pope Francis, that the words run like a fast stream to a river. The pure water that fills the river is akin to the same wonderful words repeated constantly in describing Pope Francis: his humility, simplicity, closeness to the poor, personal austerity, a man of hope, who is on a

true Mission. In addition, there are numerous anecdotes testifying to the small, but meaningful gestures he made to his people, as he traveled from city to village to country areas. His love for the poor comes from his love for Jesus Christ along with his deep spiritual life. He is close to God and close to people.

Vincent de Paul used to say that true religion is found among the poor. "Padre Jorge" as he was known, often sought out the poor. He went to Marian shrines to celebrate patronal feasts of Saints to be close to the poor, and those who lived their faith simply. He was always willing to partake in the Eucharist. As our Shepherd, Cardinal Bergoglio also visited our Miraculous Medal Shrine and accepted invitations from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to celebrate an important event or an anniversary. In the Cathedral of Buenos Aires, he shared in celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Vincentian presence in Argentina, along with our Superior General. In fact, his first priestly ordination as Archbishop of Buenos Aires was that of confreres for our province. Indeed, in 2010, one of his closest aides, the former Visitor of the province, Vicente Bokalic, was named auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires.

And if you ask our Lord: "What is it that you came to do on earth?". He would say, "To help the poor", and if we would ask, "What more?". He would respond, "To help the poor". Should we feel happy to be serving in the Mission with the same purpose as God, who committed his Son Jesus to become human? The above is a sample from a homily of our Archbishop, who is now our Holy Father. Padre Jorge, in his homilies, insisted (and he continues this theme today as Pope Francis) of the need to go out to meet people, and especially to meet the poor. As Archbishop he would often say, "Jesus is like a stray. Rarely in the Gospels do we find him preaching in the temples. He liked to go on the road and to meet people". As Vincent de Paul was convinced that Jesus Christ came to evangelize, therefore, we have to go out to like Jesus to the by-ways to find the poor and talk of God.

Francis is not just the name of our new Pope. Like the saint who bears his name, he is a symbol of a Church that is poor, simple, evangelical, and devoid of all power. In the above passage from Luke's Gospel, we hear the words to Zechariah that "there is no one among your relatives who carry the name" (Lk 1:61). This "Zechariah effect" is similar to what was heard in the media with the selection of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Like the scripture passage, with his election and taking the name of Pope Francis, "All were amazed". Francis is a 'reluctant' Pope, a man who, with his simple ways and missionary spirit, challenges you, and I to take a more radical following of Jesus Christ by way of Vincent de Paul.

“We had forgotten the supernatural factor”, said the journalist in a revelatory remark. Like this honest journalist, we can often forget that God has different criteria for choosing whom he will to accomplish his divine plans. As St. Paul reminded us God chooses what the world considers weak to confound the strong (1 Cor 1:27). “*Nomen imposuit Franciscum Sibi*”, we were told on March 13 from the loggia at St. Peter’s. “He will take the name of Francis” they told us, but actually it could just as well have been the name Vincent.

Gustavo M. González, C.M.

30 April 2013