

THE POPE AND MY THOUGHTS

When I was born, Pius XI was the Pope. Within a few years Pope Pius XII began his long reign, much of it during the second world war. He seemed distant and austere, as well as scholarly, not familiar to us as television and computers would soon make future Popes more accessible. I was a deacon (the last year before priesthood ordination). Pope John XXIII became Pope that year and I felt real devotion and love for him. He was kind of a grandfather figure. His openness and warmth were very inviting for a 25 year old soon to be ordained. Pope John Paul I could have been that kind of Pope too but he died much too soon. Pope Paul VI did a mighty job in implementing the Council but he was a quiet shy man. Pope John Paul II was Pope for over 20 years, He did some remarkable things and reached out to many peoples and religious groups. But he did not inspire as he became very authoritarian and did not help people understand the Second Vatican Council. He suppressed theologians and others who questioned him. He ignored the rising sexual abuse crisis too. So I respected him but did not admire him. I was in Rome at that time and took part in his public Masses a number of times and received ashes from him on Ash Wednesday.

He was followed by Pope Benedict XVI, a very humble and learned man. I met him when he was out shopping when he was still a Cardinal. Many of his teachings are inspiring. But he was glued to a European centered view of the Church and believed the Greek foundations of church teachings were still paramount. His demand that translations of the Mass be literal has made our Mass texts very lifeless. His decision to try to placate the schismatic group of Archbishop Lefevre's schismatic church led him to allow the Tridentine Mass on a regular basis This has contributed to a real split in the Church. His dress and formalities kept him from being his better, more human self. His resignation was heroic.

Enter Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio from Argentina. Who the heck was he? Well we have learned that this Latino has brought fresh air to the Church. He was Pope for twelve years, wrote remarkable encyclicals, such as Laudato Si on the environment and Fratelli Tutti on the human family. But his actions spoke more loudly than his teachings. His travels, practices, reform of the Church all centered on following Christ (the one who dined with sinners) to reach out to people and nations on the periphery of the world's center. He strove to bring the Second Vatican Council to be truly followed. His introduction of the Synodal Way of being

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Church flowed from this. His own humanity overflowed to embrace peoples all over the globe.

Pope Francis drew back from an imperial papacy and was very down to earth. His openness and spontaneous comments and answers to queries sometime got him into trouble with the Roman Curia. His acceptance of all people (Todos, todos, todos!) and his willingness to meet all peoples clashed with some, especially his openness to LGBTQ people, trans people and women in high places. His attempts to hold together 1.3 billion people meant he could not please all people, e.g. Western Women, African tribalists. Our American Bishops in particular did not embrace his openness, his Synodal teachings, his going beyond culture wars and abortion as the only crime of our world. He was a pastor who embraced everyone.

Pope Francis inspired me. His commitment to Jesus Christ and the Gospel were heartfelt and presented a deeper side of the Church. He challenged me as monk and priest. My prayers went further and deeper as I felt one with the people of Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, poor and unemployed people. He stirred me to ask, even in my mid-eighties, what I could do to reach out to people. One way I chose, four years ago now, was to use my writing skills to pen a regular blog, at first every two weeks and later to every three weeks. I try to challenge people to awaken, to think, to care, to live for Christ, the created world and all people. I have heard many people's stories and I respond to everyone who writes in, usually 25 to 30 people after each blog. I am more honest in how I write and how I preach. I can feel with God's people. I want to give people hope and courage.

There are some, even Cardinals, who oppose Francis because, they say, he has confused people. I say good for him. Confusion can make us think and maybe change. The post World War II Church in the west had left behind the poor people of the inner city and their communities and became comfortable, middle class, needing to preserve their property and privileges. They have accepted clericalism in their priests. Many Priests and people alike have ignored the Second Vatican Council with its teaching on liturgy, the Bible, openness to the world. Pope Francis has reached out, sometimes dramatically, to people on the peripheries, broadened the Church's concerns and challenged us, Cardinals, priests and people, to care more for each other, the earth and the poor.

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I love Francis for these and many more reasons He has been the people's Pope. I pray now that the Cardinals will embrace his wide vision of the Church and choose, as his successor, a holy, courageous and loving pastor. Are you with me? You can let me know at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.