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10 Things Pope Francis Wants You to Know



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1

“A Poor Church for the Poor”

In a March 16, 2013, session with the roughly 6,000 journalists on hand in Rome to cover the papal transition, the pope shared the story of why he chose his name in tribute to Francis of Assisi, whose love affair with “Lady Poverty” is the stuff of legend. The new pope then said, in a phrase that hints at an entire program of governance: “How I would like a poor church for the poor!”

The first thing Francis wants you to know, therefore, is that Christ came to offer love and salvation to all, but in a special way to the poor. To be a Christian thus means in a special way to never forget the poor, to invert the value system of the wider world,

and to put the poor and the forgotten at the center of our attention.

Francis made this concern for the poor the key line of his homily for his inaugural Mass on March 19, insisting that “authentic power is service,” especially service to “the poorest, the weakest, [and] the least important.” To make sure that no one missed the point, he also repeated that line in his third tweet since taking office, dispatched shortly after the Mass ended.

This instinct is not something that just came to Francis after his election. It reflects his thinking and leadership over his entire career.

“We live in the most unequal part of the world, which has grown the most yet reduced misery the least,” the future pope said during a gathering of Latin American bishops in 2007.

“The unjust distribution of goods persists, creating a situation of social sin that cries out to heaven and limits the possibilities of a fuller life for so many of our brothers.”

Economic poverty is not his only concern. He’s also reached out to those who live

in a kind of social poverty, stigmatized by others who see them with fear or prejudice. In 2001, for instance, he visited a hospice to kiss and wash the feet of twelve AIDS patients; the image of the future pope doing so has already become an icon.

To be clear, this love for the poor does not mean turning Christianity into a political party pursuing any specific program of social or economic reform. As a leader in the Jesuit order during the 1970s, then-Father Bergoglio stood out for insisting that individual conversion has to take precedence over structural change.

Yet there's no doubt that as the first pope from Latin America and the first from the developing world, Francis understands that he carries the aspirations and the yearnings of the world's poor with him. He will want to be a tribune for their concerns: the inequities of a globalized economy, the carnage of war and violence, environmental degradation, and the perception that international affairs are stacked against the interests of smaller and poorer nations.

Likewise, Francis may well want to shed

some of the traditional trappings of the papacy that speak of wealth and privilege. Right away, he declined to don the ermine-trimmed red cape known as the *mozzetta*, which was left hanging on the wardrobe in the Room of Tears as he stepped out to greet the crowd after his election.

This “pope for the poor,” in other words, wants a new commitment to the poor to be at the heart of Christianity’s role in the world, and he wants the papacy to be a credible carrier for that message.