

## The Spirit of St. Francis



# Pope Francis Why the Name Fits

This first Jesuit pope chose the name Francis. His actions are telling us why.

BY PAT McCLOSKEY, OFM

**W**hen Jesuit Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio chose to be called Pope Francis after St. Francis of Assisi, many people around the world were surprised but approved instantly.

Although Francis of Assisi was canonized two years after he died in 1226, no pope had ever selected that name. Cardinal Bergoglio's choice was innovative (patron of ecology), yet traditional (Francis and Catherine of Siena are co-patrons of Italy). Pope Francis will certainly have more to say about his namesake when he visits Assisi on October 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

A new papal style and new priorities have clearly emerged. Indeed, in one of the general congregations before the conclave, Cardinal Bergoglio stated that the Church needs to be less "self-referential" and more focused on calling attention to Jesus than to itself. Francis of Assisi could not have agreed more strongly.

Perhaps Popes Nicholas IV, Sixtus IV, Sixtus V, and Clement XIV (all Franciscans) didn't

choose the name Francis because they wanted to avoid setting the bar too high for themselves. Or maybe they passed over the name for the same reason other popes have not taken the name Peter—out of respect.

Pope Francis has certainly set the bar high for himself—and, by extension, for the Catholic Church. Other Christians quickly resonated with his name choice because St. Francis of Assisi can teach everyone a great deal.

### Explaining His Choice

On March 16, Pope Francis told over 5,000 journalists in the Paul VI Audience Hall that when he was elected, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, OFM, hugged him and said, "Don't forget the poor." Pope Francis described his new patron as "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation . . . with which we don't have such a good relationship."

After saying, "How I would like a Church that is poor and that is for the poor," the pope noted that the Church "does not have a political nature, but a spiritual one."



Pope Francis waves as he meets with patients, family, and staff at St. Francis of Assisi Hospital in Rio de Janeiro July 24. The pope addressed a group of recovering drug addicts, offering them a message of compassion and hope as well as a call to self-determination.

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Pope Francis sits with Vatican workers after celebrating Mass March 22 inside the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, the Vatican residence where the new pontiff resides. The pope took a seat in the back row as people lingered for private prayer.



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That is reinforced through the pope's choices. For example, he lives in a small suite at the Vatican's Domus Sanctae Marthae (a modest hotel) instead of the apostolic palace, and usually celebrates daily Mass and gives a homily at his new residence. For years, Cardinal Bergoglio had lived in a modest apartment, done his own cooking, and taken public transportation. He caught the world's attention by naming a commission of eight cardinals to advise him on governing the Church and reforming the Roman Curia. They are meeting on October 3 and 4.

"The Church," Pope Francis told the journalists, "is the people of God, the holy people of

God, because it is journeying toward an encounter with Jesus Christ. Christ is the pastor of the Church, but his presence passes through the freedom of human beings. Among them, one is chosen to serve as his vicar on earth. But Christ is the center, the focal point."

The pope then urged the journalists to continue trying "to discover the true nature of the Church and its journey through the world, with its virtues, as well as its sins."

The pope's July 8 visit to the Italian island of Lampedusa (to show solidarity with immigrants) and, later, to Rio de Janeiro (to participate in World Youth Day) reflected the concerns and style of his service as bishop of Rome and pope.

### Pope Francis in Brazil

His July 22-29 visit to Rio de Janeiro and to the Marian shrine at Aparecida confirmed a new papal style.

At Aparecida, the heads of bishops' conferences of Latin America spent a month in 2007, drawing up a plan for evangelizing that continent anew. Cardinal Bergoglio chaired that work. Catholic News Service reported that on July 24 he told pilgrims there, "The Aparecida document was born of this interplay between the labors of the bishops and the simple faith of the pilgrims." He later said, "Always know in your hearts that God is by your side; he never abandons you."

Later that day he described the Hospital of St. Francis of Assisi in a working-class neighborhood as "a shrine of human suffering" whose patients are "the flesh of Christ." The pope went on to recall Francis' embrace of a leper outside Assisi. During this visit, Pope Francis dedicated a new wing for treatment of users of crack cocaine. He described the entire hospital as a place where "the parable of the good Samaritan is made tangible. Here there is no indifference, but concern. There is no apathy, but love."

On July 25, he told the residents of Rio's Varginha shantytown: "Only when we are able to share do we become truly rich; everything that is shared is multiplied! The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty!"

That day's welcoming ceremony at Copacabana Beach drew an estimated 1 million pilgrims. Rhoe Price (20, from Narre Warren, Australia) described the humility and simplicity of the pope as "inspiring," reported Catholic News Service.

Two days later, Pope Francis urged Brazilian bishops to lead without being authoritarian, to live simply and austere, and to avoid episcopal careerism. He also pointed out that clericalism has kept the Church from fulfilling its mission of sharing Jesus' good news.

At the final Mass, Pope Francis urged those present to go, to not be afraid, and to serve. "The life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service," he reminded them.

### Everything Belongs to God

St. Francis of Assisi considered "appropriation" as the root sin because it claims for a person what belongs to God alone. In calling us to live more truthfully, Pope Francis is inviting us to avoid claiming for ourselves what belongs to God alone.



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Pope Francis blesses a boy in the Varginha shantytown in Rio de Janeiro July 25, during his weeklong visit to Brazil for World Youth Day.



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(Above) Pope Francis accepts the offertory gifts during Mass on the island of Lampedusa July 8. The pope called for repentance over treatment of migrants during his visit to the Italian island where massive numbers of Africans have landed in attempts to reach Europe.

To put it another way, Pope Francis, who was a servant leader as archbishop of Buenos Aires for 15 years, is encouraging Catholics and others to avoid appropriation, but, instead, to be humbly attentive to the truth, goodness, and beauty that come from God alone.

At the July 25 welcoming ceremony at Copacabana Beach, Pope Francis cited St. Paul's advice, "Put on Christ" (Rom 13:14). The pope continued: "Place your trust in him and you will never be disappointed! You see how faith accomplishes a revolution in us, one which we can call Copernican, because it removes us from the center and restores it to God; faith immerses us in his love and gives us security, strength, and hope."

Francis of Assisi would heartily agree. ☒

Father Pat McCloskey, OFM, is Franciscan editor of this publication. He edited Franciscan Media's updated and revised *Saint of the Day* volume published last month.

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