

The Franciscan Revolution

Gennaro Matino (December 17, 2014)



“He shall be called Francis.” Never before had a name rung with such clarity in the ears of those awaiting word of the new Pope in Saint Peter’s.

His name aside, Francis has been a world of surprises for the meek and reminded the Church of its original revolutionary power, of its duty to strap on an apron and serve others to account for the hope that others have placed in it, the hope to shout truth from the rooftops, to tend to the afflicted, to open the closed windows of egoism onto the salvation of charity.

Since I was a boy I have dreamed of a pope who would choose the name Francis, believing the name of the pauper from Assisi was itself sufficient to change the course of the Church. [Francis of Assisi](#) [2] is considered the most representative saint of the past millennium, so much so that, when deciding on a candidate for the man of the millennium, a newspaper as skeptical as the New York Times didn’t hesitate to name Francis.



He has garnered admiration for his pacifist revolution that both stirs us and makes us reflect, for having chosen to embrace poverty and transform the conditions of social privilege into an opportunity to engage the poorest — giving more of himself than material wealth. But his real transformative power is linguistic, revolutionary for its words and signs, the likes of which haven't been heard in the Church for a long time. The majority of his contemporaries in Europe were, formally, believers, not evangelists.

The Franciscan revolution, the revolution of a new evangelism in Europe, lies in the choice of symbolic, structural, linguistic and interpretive places to preach the Word. Enculturation, discovered by the “folly” of Francis, becomes a method to speak intimately of the evangelical path: it goes from being prophecy to being a method. But Francis is also the name of the first [Jesuit](#) [3] saint to evangelize the East. One name embodies the sanctity of a life dedicated to the humblest, the proclamation of a more just world and the will to preach the Gospel to the far reaches of the earth.

While many groups look to the Church to continue preaching the Gospel and practicing its teachings, to be more present in the tribulations of our day, and further asks that the Word be adapted to the changes that have taken place in the world while also being purified from within, the Holy Spirit has given us a pope named Francis. Cardinal Bergoglio already demonstrated his dedication to the struggle for justice and his sympathy for the meek in his diocese in Buenos Aires;

now, as Pope of the Universal Church, he appears poised to hew a difficult stretch of road with us, to restore meaning to words while not speaking the same language as the Church, words of love showered upon all his children, without exception and without hesitation.

The world has anxiously awaited this moment, and to those for whom the Church is a thing of the past, prisoner of its own problems, to those who have tried at all costs, inside and outside its walls, to drag it into disgraceful wars, Pope Francis is answering with gentility and prophetic power.

It's a difficult job for the Pope, even more so for someone charged with giving hope to worshippers while speaking to the new world. For now, such hope lies in that marvelous name: Francis, our Pope, who would be called Francis.

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