

## **In the Heartland With Bishop Richard E. Pates**

### **The World Rejoices at the Election of Pope Francis**

The world pulsates with the excitement of the new Pope, Francis I. He is the first to come from the Americas and the Hispanic contingent is particularly proud to see one of their own assume such prominent leadership.

Latin America numbers some 40% of the world's Catholics – the most of any continental group. Pope Francis brings with him the Latino gifts of a vibrant integrated intellectual and emotional expression of faith, dedication to family life and traditions, a commitment to social justice and advocacy and service to the poor, and a popular devotion to “The Madonna,” to Mary, the Mother of God.

The new Pontiff bridges the traditions of the Society of Jesus – “the Jesuits” and the followers of St. Francis – “Franciscans.” St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, endowed his community and followers ever since with “Ignatian Spirituality.” Quite simply, this is a methodology in which a person places oneself in a situation where that individual can discern God's will for him or her by meditating. Central is one's attention to reflection on the Scriptures vis-à-vis personal experience and then move forward in ongoing conversion and the implementation of God's will in the concrete circumstances of one's life.

In taking the name Francis, the new Pope signals that his style, as has been characteristic throughout his life, will be simple and not caught up in the trappings of office or those of the secular world. Such a stance enables him to draw attention to God's goodness in the world and the beauty of creation, God's gift to all. In particular, the sacredness of each human brother and sister is highlighted.

Pope Francis' approach calls us to value that which is at the heart of our humanity and to commit ourselves to the life and dignity of all who have been given existence by the ever generous will of God. In particular, focus will be drawn to protection of human rights, the care of creation, and the proportionately equitable sharing of the world's goods based on good stewardship.

In his early student days, Pope Francis concentrated on scientific study, specifically chemistry. Given this rich intellectual background he will be able to utilize a language that addresses the contemporary scientific method. In great measure, such a method has spawned a mentality that there is no reality beyond the material or that which can be physically analyzed.

In this age of evangelization, perhaps Pope Francis will be able to communicate with the influential scientific community to recognize realities such as love, truth, loyalty, sorrow. We know such exist though they cannot be physically measured. Moving into this

spiritual world introduces one ultimately to God. Such a journey can be profound but yet is accessible to all because of its simplicity.

Pope Francis brings his personal gifts and life experience to a role established by Jesus in the scriptures. He is the successor of Peter, the Apostle, upon whom Jesus communicated an identity and tasks. They are:

- I. Rock on which the Church is Built: After Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah the Son of the living God, Jesus said: “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19).
- II. Pastoral Role in Nurturing God’s Flock: After his resurrection, Jesus put a question repeated three times to Peter countering Peter’s three-fold denial at the time of his passion. Jesus asked: “Do you love me?” Peter responded with a full and insistent expression of love each time. In each case Jesus told him to “Feed my lambs,” “Feed my sheep.” Thus, the role of Peter is to provide spiritual nourishment for the People of God – Christ’s very body. (John 21:15-19)
- III. Called to be a Source of Strength for His Brothers: In the midst of the enormous strain of the passion and death of Jesus, Peter in the aftermath was to be the source of strength for his brothers - the apostolic company and the disciples of Jesus. Christ told him: “Simon, Simon behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32) The role of rallying and supporting the brothers is ever so vital for the successor of Peter in a world which challenges and even persecutes those of faith boldly and widely.

### Bishop of Rome

Because he is successor of Peter, the Pope resides in Rome where the Apostle Peter exercised his final ministry as shepherd. A reporter recently asked me “Why is the Catholic Church located in Rome, at the Vatican?”

It is there on Vatican Hill that in imitation of Jesus, Peter was crucified. His bones are entombed there. Thus, on this spot Pope Francis I undertakes the Petrine ministry as the 266<sup>th</sup> successor of Peter. For the sake of our Church and our world, may his ministry be abundantly blessed.