



the CHURCH *of*
MERCY

BY

POPE FRANCIS

A VISION FOR THE CHURCH

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Chicago

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	VII
PREFACE	XI
PART ONE The Good News of Christ.....	1
1. The Embrace of God’s Mercy.....	3
2. The Light of Faith.....	7
3. The Christian Message	9
4. The Revolution of Freedom.....	12
5. Being with Christ.....	15
PART TWO A Poor Church for the Poor	21
6. Listen to the Cry of the Poor	23
7. A House of Communion	26
8. A House That Welcomes All.....	30
9. A House of Harmony	33
10. Sent to Bring the Gospel to All the World	36
PART THREE Listening to the Spirit.....	41
11. Be Guided by the Holy Spirit	43
12. Good News, Harmony, Mission	46
PART FOUR Proclamation and Testimony	51
13. Do Not Be Afraid.....	53
14. Bringing the Word of God.....	55
15. Called to Proclaim the Gospel	58
16. Conveying Hope and Joy	62
17. Giving All.....	65

PART FIVE | Full-Time Christians 69

18. Coming Out of Ourselves 71

19. Walking 75

20. Taking the Cross 77

21. Evangelizing 80

PART SIX | Shepherds with the “Odor of the Sheep” 83

22. To Be a Pastor 85

23. Priests Who Come to Serve 89

24. The Anointing of the People 92

PART SEVEN | The Choice of the Last 97

25. To the Outskirts of Existence 99

26. Hospitality and Service 102

27. Refugees and Those Uprooted from Life 104

28. A Culture of Solidarity 106

PART EIGHT | Demolishing the Idols 109

29. The Logic of Power and Violence 111

30. The Cult of the God of Money 113

31. The Leprosy of Careerism 115

32. Undressing the Spirit of the World 117

PART NINE | The Culture of Good 119

33. Free to Choose Good 121

34. The Hunger for Dignity 124

35. The Commitment to Peace 127

36. For a New Solidarity 129

PART TEN | Mary, Mother of Evangelization 131

37. Her Example..... 133

38. Her Faith..... 136

39. Her Intercession 140

ESSENTIAL CHRONOLOGY OF POPE FRANCIS’S LIFE 144

LIST OF SOURCES..... 147

Foreword

Who? That was the question many found themselves asking on March 13, 2013, following the announcement that Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio had been elected Pope. The election of the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires surprised a great number of us. However, once Pope Francis appeared on the balcony with that lovely smile, his simplicity and humility evident, the initial surprise soon gave way to certainty that this man was God's choice. Our new Holy Father's first act (after cracking a joke about the cardinals having to go to the ends of the earth to find a new Bishop of Rome) was to ask us to pray for him before he bestowed his blessing upon us. The silence was so powerful! Pope Francis is now well-known and much-loved throughout the world, not just by Catholics, but by very many others besides—including those who profess no religious allegiance. Such is the remarkably positive impression he has made after less than a year in office.

At the Mass of Thanksgiving for the election of Pope Francis in Westminster Cathedral the day after, I quoted some words he had written while he was still Archbishop of Buenos Aires: "Only someone who has encountered mercy, who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy, is happy and comfortable with the Lord." The mission of Pope Francis is, I said, to enable us to experience "the caress of the mercy of Jesus Christ on my sin." From our encounter with mercy, from our experience of the tender caress of Jesus, a profound joy and hope is born in our hearts. It is a joy and hope that grants us the courage to go out from ourselves to share with others the delight of meeting Jesus. We are not afraid to go even to the furthest edges of human existence because the Lord walks with us and, indeed, before us. The motto

of Pope Francis, taken from the Venerable Bede's commentary on the call of St. Matthew, *miserando atque eligendo*, means lowly but chosen—literally in Latin “by having mercy, by choosing him.” This is our motto too. Having been touched by Jesus' mercy and chosen by him, we are sent out, sinners that we are, to be heralds, missionary disciples, of divine mercy. Our desire is the same as that of Pope Francis: that everyone experiences the Church as merciful.

The Church of Mercy will, I am sure, help our common desire to be realized. It is a most welcome publication. This collection of texts, taken from the Holy Father's homilies, addresses, and official teaching documents, shows just how admirably Pope Francis can find a turn of phrase that catches our attention, engages our imaginations, and moves us to action—and even makes us laugh out loud! But, as this collection also shows, these are no shallow sound bites. No, there is real substance behind them. Pope Francis's words reflect his profound immersion in the sacred Scriptures, the Fathers, and the witness of his predecessors, not least that of Benedict XVI. They are words whose meaning we find most effectively conveyed in the gestures of Pope Francis, gestures flowing from a life of prayer.

Prayer must enjoy primacy. The first duty of a bishop, the Pope reminds me, is to pray, then to proclaim the Gospel by my life and deeds. Evangelization *is* the mission of a Church that welcomes all and is willing to journey “to the edges” as the servant of those dwelling in poverty, both material and spiritual. Such a universal mission demands that we are a Church ceaselessly praying to the Holy Spirit. Our need to be guided by the Holy Spirit is pivotal to understanding everything Pope Francis proclaims in word and action. We are called and sent out to be Spirit-filled evangelizers. It is the Holy Spirit who fixes our gaze on Jesus, who assures us that Jesus' gaze is always upon us, who each day makes wonderfully new our relationship with Jesus.

This is the true radicalism of the Pope's message: Jesus must always be at the center. Intimacy with him is the heart of all we do and are, and it is the heart into which we wish to welcome others. Our inspiration—the treasure we long to share—is the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not look to sociology, philosophy, or any political ideology to explain why we must be a

poor Church for the poor. We look to Christ, who reveals to us the face of God, the Father of mercies. To look to Christ is to look to the poor. To reach out to the poor is to reach out and touch the flesh of Christ. We do so with humility. For from those “on the edges” we have so much to learn.

Bishops, priests, deacons, all pastoral workers, every Christian, and especially young people—for whom Pope Francis has such obvious love—will find this book a source of great encouragement and consolation. So, too, will they find it extremely challenging! The Pope asks penetrating questions that catapult us out of any self-centered complacency into which we may have fallen. I frequently found myself using the text as an examination of conscience. Yet never was it a cause for despair. For we are reassured that God’s patient mercy is infinitely greater than our sinfulness. God will never abandon us. This is a beautiful truth for everyone to hear. Therefore I hope this book will reach as wide a readership as possible.

Finally, Pope Francis invites us to take Mary as our example. Mary, woman of faith, hope, and love; Mary who listens prayerfully; Mary ever guided by the Holy Spirit; Mary always obedient to the Father’s will; Mary who teaches us how to give flesh to Christ in our world, how to be the “Church of Mercy.” In so doing, Mary the Mother of Mercy is also Mother of our Joy.

Vincent Cardinal Nichols

Vincent Cardinal Nichols is the Archbishop of Westminster and head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.

On February 22, 2014, Pope Francis appointed Nichols to the Sacred College of Cardinals.

Preface

It is only a year since Pope Francis began his pontificate, but his pastoral plans for the Church seem already very well-defined. From the start his words, gestures, and decisions have clearly shown the style and direction he intends his teaching magisterium to have. As time has gone by, his vision has extended and consolidated, opening up new horizons for the Church's life. In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), the pope set out the main goals of his plan, thus writing the Church's "Magna Carta" for the coming years. In its broad vision and rich contents, the exhortation resembles an encyclical letter. His words are all about the missionary face of the Church and, most of all, the new way of "being Church" that the pope would like the Church to adopt through a more authentic proclamation and witness to the Gospel by Christians.

Obviously, Pope Francis is well aware that the Church's poor fishermen have fragile boats and much-mended nets, and that, despite their efforts, they are often not able to catch anything. This is what he reminded the Brazilian bishops of in the Document of Aparecida (27 July 2013). Since God's will underlies everything, Pope Francis also knows well that the strength of the Church doesn't depend on its members and their capabilities, because they are both weak and inadequate. Rather its strength "is hidden in the deep water of God, where it is summoned to cast its nets."

How these nets should be cast is the focus of Pope Francis's apostolic preaching and mission. This collection of papers is basically the framework that defines the pastoral and ecclesial program. The keyword of his program, which signposts the way, is sealed in the title: *mercy*. Indeed, Francis's Church

wants to be recognized first of all as the house of mercy that, between human weakness and God's patience, welcomes and helps find the "good news" of the great Christian hope. Whoever reaches this house and surrenders to God's mercy will not only cease to feel lonely and abandoned but will also discover a fuller existence, lit up by faith and the love of the living God—Christ who died, rose again, and now is alive in his Church. Whoever meets him and stays with him learns the grammar of a Christian life and, first of all, the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, for brotherly and sisterly love, which Christians must spread in the world as joyful witnesses to God's mercy. Not only do they need to show understanding and sympathy, and remain close to those who endure moral or physical sufferings, but they also need to become people who truly and deeply bear others' pains and difficulties with the greatest tenderness, magnanimity, and solidarity, and to be people who offer solace, hope, and encouragement to keep on walking on the path of the Lord of life.

The good news of Christianity is Christ himself. His words give salvation and life because he is shelter and life. In the Church, people believe in this truth of faith, and all who adopt it as the fullness of the sacramental life find their direction and support to live as Christians, whose goal is holiness. The steps toward this finishing line are listening, proclaiming, and witnessing to the Gospel. According to Pope Francis's theology, full-time Christians don't sit down to admire their faith in the reflection of a mirror, nor talk about it over dinner, but they come out of themselves, embrace their cross with courage and walk the streets to share with everybody the joy of the Gospel. Pope Francis never gets tired of telling everyone that evangelizing is conversion, going out, and walking. The first to be summoned are the priests, "anointed to anoint," whose duties are to welcome and to serve. They are asked not to be afraid to go to the furthest boundaries and outskirts of human existence to meet the poor, the marginalized, and the least.

Those who are materially, spiritually, and humanly poor are not the focus of special attention because they are an economic, social, or pastoral problem, but because the loving God, poor among the poor, reserved for them a privileged place in Christ's life and ministry. The "poor Church for the poor"

of Pope Francis is a principle that defines in an evangelistic sense the choice of poverty and service to the poor, thus continuing the wonderful story of a loving Church that throughout the centuries has been a way to liberation, inclusion, and promotion for the poor, following Christ's idea of liberty and love. Christ indeed offers not only generous, practical, and constant solidarity, but he also actively affirms human dignity, pursues justice, and builds a civilization that is effectively "human."

In this context of pastoral vision for the Church, Pope Francis's idea of human beings in relation to society is embedded. His distinctive emphasis runs parallel to and interacts with the rest. His strong and direct speech shakes consciences to strike the "hardened" heart of a society whose culture is not open to the idea of coming together for the common good. These are the premises for a neighborly and peaceful existence. It is not possible to move forward toward a better world until such idols as power, money, corruption, careerism, selfishness, indifference, or, to sum up, "the spirit of the world," are demolished.

These concepts are clearly explained also in *Evangelii gaudium*, which reveals to us both the bad habits that need to be abandoned and the pastoral priorities in the public life of the Church. In this effort the pope leads the way by word and sets the pace, which quickens day by day. His aim is to let people understand that an authentic Christianity, faithful to the spirit of the Gospel, is not achievable if the people in Christian communities have a weary and half-asleep faith, without any thrill of excitement, a faith shut up within the walls of their hearts or church buildings. This is the danger that might materialize if the Church grows old and accustomed to caring only about itself rather than flinging open its doors and facing the challenges of the world. It doesn't matter if the Church sometimes fails on the way. This is why Pope Francis keeps sending out warnings that heavy-handedness, intransigence, hypocrisy, and other shortcomings need to be abolished because they undermine Christian credibility. He is determined to reform and renew the Church so that it becomes better equipped to pursue its goals, with all that that involves.

In short, the life of the Church needs to be cleansed, renewed, and revitalized. This requires an ecclesial and pastoral discernment that enables the Church to rediscover the essence of its missionary mandate, in the light of the Holy Spirit and with the intercession of Mary, mother of the task of proclaiming the Gospel.

Giuliano Vigni

Giuliano Vigni is a Professor at The Catholic University of Milan and has edited books by Pope Paul VI; Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini; Pope Benedict 16th; and Pope Francis.

PART ONE

The Good News of Christ

The Embrace of God's Mercy

*Homily for the Mass for the Possession of the Chair of the
Bishop of Rome, 7 April 2013*

What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God's love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unfailing love, one that always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up, and leads us on.

In the Gospel of John (20:19–28), the apostle Thomas personally experiences this mercy of God, which has a concrete face: the face of Jesus, the risen Jesus. Thomas does not believe it when the other apostles tell him, “We have seen the Lord.” It isn't enough for him that Jesus had foretold it, promised it: “On the third day I will rise.” He wants to see, he wants to put his hand in the place of the nails and in Jesus' side. And how does Jesus react? With *patience*: Jesus does not abandon Thomas in his stubborn unbelief; he gives him a week's time. He does not close the door; he waits. And Thomas acknowledges his own poverty, his little faith: “My Lord and my God!” With this simple yet faith-filled invocation, he responds to Jesus' patience. He lets himself be enveloped by divine mercy; he sees it before his eyes, in the wounds of Christ's hands and feet and in his open side, and he discovers trust. He is a new man, no longer an unbeliever, but a believer.

Let us also remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him. And when he hits rock bottom, he meets the gaze of Jesus who patiently, wordlessly, says to him, “Peter, don't be afraid of your weakness, trust in me.” Peter understands, he feels the loving gaze of

Jesus, and he weeps. How beautiful is this gaze of Jesus—how much tenderness is there! Brothers and sisters, let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God!

Let us think too of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: their sad faces, their barren journey, their despair. But Jesus does not abandon them: he walks beside them, and not only that! Patiently he explains the Scriptures, which spoke of him, and he stays to share a meal with them. This is God's way of doing things: he is

*Let us remember
this in our lives as
Christians: God always
waits for us, even when
we have left him
behind!*

not impatient like us, who often want everything all at once, even in our dealings with other people. God is patient with us because he loves us, and those who love are able to understand, to hope, and to inspire confidence. They do not give up, they do not burn bridges, they are able to forgive. Let us remember this in our lives as Christians: God always waits for us, even when we have left him behind! He is never far from us, and if we return to him, he is ready to embrace us.

I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful father; it impresses me because it always gives me great hope. Think of that younger son who was in the father's house, who was loved; and yet he wants his part of the inheritance. He goes off, spends everything, hits rock bottom, where he could not be more distant from the father. Yet when he is at his lowest, he misses the warmth of the father's house and he goes back. And the father? Had he forgotten the son? No, never. He is there, he sees the son from afar; he was waiting for him every hour of every day. The son was always in his father's heart, even though he had left him, even though he had squandered his whole inheritance, his freedom. The father, with patience, love, hope, and mercy had never for a second stopped thinking about him, and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: his son has returned! And that is the joy of the father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us; he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we

can regain confidence, hope—always! A great German theologian, Romano Guardini, said that God responds to our weakness by his patience, and this is the reason for our confidence, our hope (see *Glaubenserkenntnis* [Würzburg, 1949], p. 28). It is like a dialogue between our weakness and the patience of God; it is a dialogue that, if we have it, will grant us hope.

I would like to emphasize one other thing: God's patience has to call forth in us *the courage to return to him*, however many mistakes and sins there may be in our life. Jesus tells Thomas to put his hand in the wounds of his hands and his feet and in his side. We too can enter the wounds of Jesus; we can actually touch him. This happens every time we receive the sacraments with faith. St. Bernard, in a fine homily, said: "Through the wounds of Jesus I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty rock (see Deut. 32:13), I can taste and see the goodness of the Lord" (*On the Song of Songs* 61:4). It is there, in the wounds of Jesus, that we are truly secure; there we encounter the boundless love of his heart. Thomas understood this. St. Bernard goes on to ask: But what can I count on? My own merits? No. "My merit is God's mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as he is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits" (61:5). This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus' mercy, to trust in his patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of his love. St. Bernard even stated, "So what if my conscience gnaws at me for my many sins? 'Where sin has abounded, there grace has abounded all the more' (Rom. 5:20)" (61:5).

Maybe someone among us here is thinking, *My sin is so great, I am as far from God as the younger son in the parable; my unbelief is like that of Thomas. I don't have the courage to go back, to believe that God can welcome me and that he is*

waiting for me, of all people. But God is indeed waiting for you; he asks of you only the courage to go to him. How many times in my pastoral ministry have I heard it said, "Father, I have many sins"? And I have always pleaded, "Don't be afraid, go to him, he is waiting for you, he will take care of everything." We hear many offers from the world around us; but let us take up God's offer instead: his is a caress of love. For God, we are not numbers, we are

But God is indeed waiting for you; he asks of you only the courage to go to him.

important; indeed we are the most important thing to him. Even if we are sinners, we are what is closest to his heart.

The Light of Faith

Lumen fidei, nos. 4 and 34, 29 June 2013

There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, and once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, because it is capable of illuminating *every* aspect of human existence. A light this powerful cannot come from us but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love that precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfillment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time. It is a light coming from the past, the light of the foundational memory of the life of Jesus, which revealed his perfectly trustworthy love, a love capable of triumphing over death. Yet because Christ has risen and draws us beyond death, faith is also a light coming from the future and opening before us vast horizons that guide us beyond our isolated selves toward the breadth of communion. We come to see that faith does not dwell in shadow and gloom; it is a light for our darkness.

The light of love proper to faith can illumine the questions of our own time concerning truth. Truth nowadays is often reduced to the subjective authenticity of the individual, valid only to the life of the individual. A common truth intimidates us, for we identify it with the intransigent demands of totalitarian systems. But if truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, because believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth that embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.

The truth of love cannot be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual.

The Christian Message

Homily for the Easter Vigil, 30 March 2013

In the Gospel of the Easter Vigil, we first meet the women who go to the tomb of Jesus with spices to anoint his body (see Luke 24:1–3). They go to perform an act of compassion, a traditional act of affection and love for a dear departed person, just as we would. They had followed Jesus, they had listened to his words, they had felt understood by him in their dignity, and they had accompanied him to the very end, to Calvary and to the moment when he was taken down from the cross. We can imagine their feelings as they make their way to the tomb: a certain sadness, a sorrow that Jesus has left them, that he died, that his life has come to an end. Life will now go on as before. Yet the women continue to feel love, the love for Jesus that now leads them to his tomb.

But at this point, something completely new and unexpected happens, something that upsets their hearts and their plans, something that will upset their whole life. They see the stone removed from before the tomb; they draw near, and they do not find the Lord's body. It is an event that leaves them perplexed and hesitant, full of questions: "What happened?" "What is the meaning of all this?" (see Luke 24:4).

Doesn't the same thing happen to us when something completely new occurs in our everyday life? We stop short, we don't understand, we don't know what to do. *Newness* often makes us fearful, including the newness God brings us, the newness God asks of us. We are like the apostles in the Gospel:

often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God's surprises. Dear brothers and sisters, we are afraid of God's surprises! He always surprises us! The Lord is like that.

Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up. There are no situations that God cannot change; there is no sin that he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him.

But let us return to the Gospel, to the women, and take one step further. They find the tomb empty, the body of Jesus is not there, something new has happened, but all of this still doesn't tell them anything certain. It raises questions; it leaves them confused, without offering an answer. And suddenly there are two men in dazzling clothes who say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; but has risen" (Luke 24:5–6). What began as a simple act, done surely out of love—going to the tomb—has now turned into an event, a truly life-changing event. Nothing remains as it was before, not only in the lives of those women, but also in our own lives and in the history of humankind. Jesus is not dead, he has risen, he is alive! He does not simply return to life; rather, he is life itself, because he is the Son of God, *the living God* (see Num. 14:21–28; Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10).

Jesus no longer belongs to the past but lives in the present and is projected toward the future; Jesus is the everlasting "today" of God. This is how the newness of God appears to the women, the disciples, and all of us: as victory over sin, evil, and death—over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. And this is a message meant for me and for you, dear sister, for you, dear brother. How often does Love have to tell us, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Our daily problems and worries can wrap us up in ourselves, in sadness and bitterness . . . and that is where death is. That is not the place to look for the One who is alive!

Let the risen Jesus enter your life—welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk; you won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid. Trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you, and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

*If up till now you
have kept Jesus at a
distance, step forward.
He will receive you
with open arms.*

Essential Chronology of **POPE FRANCIS'S** *Life*

1936

17 December Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires into a family originally from Marche (Italy) who had immigrated to Argentina. Mario, his father, was an accountant in the railway company; Regina Sivori, his mother; was a homemaker. Jorge was the first of five children; his siblings are Óscar, Marta, Alberto, and María Elena.

1957

After achieving his diploma in chemistry, chose to become a priest and started seminary in Villa Devoto.

1960

12 March Took his first vows.

1963

After completing humanities studies in Santiago, Chile, returned to Argentina, earning his philosophy degree at San José College in San Miguel.

1970

Finished his theological studies and graduated from San José College.

1930

1950

1958

11 March Started his novitiate at the Society of Jesus.

1960

1964–66

Taught literature and psychology, first in Santa Fé and then in Buenos Aires.

1969

13 December Ordained a priest.

1970

1973

22 April Made his perpetual profession.

31 July After having been consultor, became provincial superior of Argentina's Jesuits.

1992

20 May After Bergoglio served for several years as spiritual director and confessor, John Paul II appointed him auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. Worked closely with Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, from whom he received episcopal ordination (27 June). Chose as his motto *Miserando atque eligendo* ("Having mercy, He chose him") and inserted the Christogram IHS, symbol of the Society of Jesus, into his coat of arms.

2001

21 February Created a cardinal by John Paul II.

2013

11 February Benedict XVI announced he would relinquish the Petrine ministry at the end of the month.

13 March Elected the new supreme pontiff, choosing the name *Francis*—he is the first Latin American pope, the first Jesuit pope, and the first to take the name *Francis*.

7 April Took his seat as Bishop of Rome on the Cathedra Romana.

24 June Created a pontifical commission to investigate the Institute for Works of Religion (the Vatican Bank).

29 June First encyclical *Lumen fidei* published, thus completing the document Benedict XVI bequeathed to him.

8 July Made a historic visit to the island of Lampedusa.

1980

1980
Appointed rector of San José College, where he worked until 1986, when he stepped down to study theology in Germany and research Romano Guardini for his doctoral dissertation. His studies in Germany were interrupted by a summons from his superiors in Argentina to take up higher positions. Ministered as a priest in a parish in Córdoba.

1990

21 December
Appointed vicar general of the archdiocese of Buenos Aires.

1997

3 June Promoted to coadjutor archbishop of Buenos Aires. Upon Cardinal Quarracino's death a year later, succeeded him in leading the archdiocese (28 February) and became the primate of Argentina.

2000

2005
Took part in the conclave electing Benedict XVI.

2010

2013
22–29 July Took part in World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
22 September Pastoral visit to Cagliari.
28 September Established the Council of Cardinals, tasked with advising Francis on ruling the Universal Church and starting reorganization of the apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus*, regarding the role of the Roman Curia.
4 October Made pastoral visit to Assisi.
24 November Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* published.

2014

22 February Summoned a consistory for the creation of new cardinals.

A Young Woman Lives Out the Call for Mercy

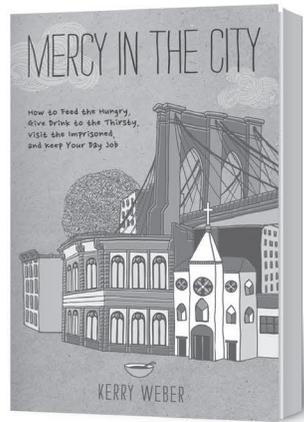
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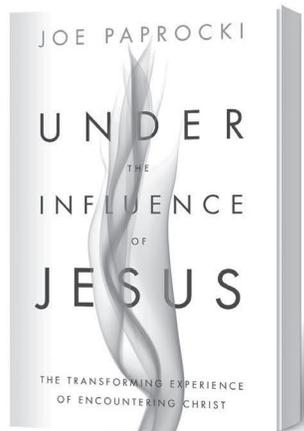
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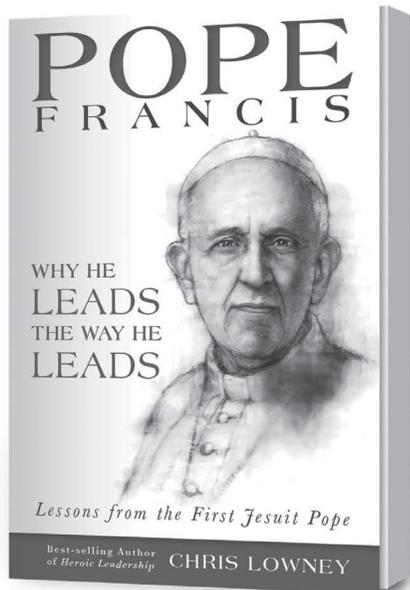
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