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# Pope Francis gives reason to hope this Easter season

Fr. Peter Daly | Apr. 1, 2013 Parish Diary

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Every Easter, we have reason to sing alleluia because of new life in Christ.

But this Easter, we have another reason to sing alleluia. It seems we have new life in the church. The election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis, the new bishop of Rome, has given us new vigor and a reason to hope. Everyone in my parish seems delighted with him. We are excited by the news from Rome and happy with the tone he is setting.

A month ago, I wrote [1] about what I hoped for in the new pope. I said I hoped for a "regular guy." Miracle of miracles, we got one. Pope Francis is a regular guy. He seems to understand ordinary people and their lives.

I wanted someone who had been a parish priest. While the new pope has never been a parish priest, he has been a very pastoral bishop. He has a wonderful pastoral sense. He seems to know that being a pastor is not so much about enforcing rules as it is about sharing grace. He admonished the priests of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to baptize the babies of single mothers. He wants the church to welcome people, not stand in the way of their coming to Christ.

He also values our prayer. When Pope Francis appeared on the balcony and asked for our blessing, I was moved to tears. He has the heart of a pastor who knows he needs prayer.

I hoped we would get someone from a large family and someone who had old friends who could speak to him frankly and honestly. Pope Francis is one of five children. His siblings can probably speak to him directly. He is also a Jesuit. In community life, his confreres called him by his first name, and he was not afraid of honest conversation among equals.

We really seem to have a man who understands the struggles of ordinary people. The pope's father was a railroad worker and an immigrant. As bishop, Cardinal Bergoglio lived simply, in an ordinary apartment, with no servants. He took the bus to work, like the millions of ordinary workers.

I love the fact that he took the time to call the man who delivered his newspaper back home in Buenos Aires to cancel his subscription. He thanked the man for his years of service.

I also love that he celebrated Mass for the street sweepers of Rome who had been working so hard around the Vatican in recent days. He remembers ordinary folks. He values their contributions.

Pope Francis also seems to know how things look. Too much show and wealth are an impediment in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the pope went down to Santa Maria Maggiore in an ordinary unmarked police car instead of the papal limo, he sent a message.

Jesus said he was among us as "one who serves." By going to a youth prison on Holy Thursday to wash the feet

of the young prisoners, the pope set precisely the right tone for Holy Week. He gets the concept of "servant leadership."

Before the election, I said I wanted someone who would dialogue with other faiths. This pope has the respect of the Jewish community back home in Buenos Aires and the Eastern Orthodox churches. The presence of the patriarch of Constantinople at his installation was a great start.

The day after his installation, when Pope Francis met with the press, he showed great respect for their religious sensitivities, recognizing that they were not all of his faith, or any faith. He prayed for them in silence and then said simply, "God bless you."

So far, so good. The pope is sending all the right signals. Soon, however, we will want more than atmosphere. We will look for substance.

While I don't expect any major changes, I do hope for real structural reform.

First, our new pope needs to take seriously the protection of children. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago has said this should be the No. 1 priority.

In the U.S., we now have strict accountability for priests, religious and lay workers. We do not have accountability for bishops. It is Rome's unique responsibility to enforce accountability for bishops. Thus far, no bishop has been forced to resign because of his failure to protect children, even though there have been many such failures. At a minimum, any bishop who has been convicted of a crime related to child protection should resign. If Pope Francis asks for some resignations, we will know that Rome is finally serious about child protection.

Second, we need real reform of the Roman Curia (the pope's "cabinet" of advisers). Rome needs a house-cleaning. Many people were saying that in the days before the conclave. The Vatican should not be the top of a career ladder for clerics. John Allen reported that there are 38 cardinals in the Roman Curia. Do we really need so many?

Why does every Vatican department have to be headed by a bishop who has no diocese or a priest who has no parish? Couldn't some of the Vatican dicasteries (departments) be headed by laypeople? Why couldn't some of them be headed by women?

For instance, shouldn't the Pontifical Council for the Family be headed by a married person? Why not appoint a layperson to head the Council for the Laity? Why can't the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life be headed by a nun? Maybe the Council for Health Care Ministry could be headed by doctor or nurse? Why not?

Third, I hope "collegiality" among the bishops will be more meaningful and not just lip service. Bishops are not mere functionaries. They are not employees of Rome.

Synods of bishops should have real debate. The bishops should be able to set the agendas. Maybe they could actually discuss controversial issues like celibacy that are before the church without fear of censure.

Fourth, I hope for more simplicity, especially in liturgy and the personal style of the clergy. If we are a church for the poor, we should not look so rich.

We already have seen a new spirit of humility and simplicity. We need less lace and more grace. The people at the top could set an example. In recent years, there has been way too much emphasis on vesture and gesture.

Priesthood is about service, not playing "dress up."

Finally, and most important, I hope Pope Francis will reorient the church to the real problems of poverty, peace and care for God's creation. He has already said as much in his installation. He wants to be the pope of peace, the poor and of respect for creation. Good.

The whole church has been wearing a smile lately. This Easter, that's another reason to sing alleluia!

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