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# Me to 20-year-old me: Pope Francis' voice matters

Kate Childs Graham | Mar. 27, 2014 Young Voices

*This is the second in a series about why I love Pope Francis [1]. As promised, in this column, I will try to explain to my 20-year-old-self why I think this old dude's voice matters.*

Dear 20-year-old me,

You'll never believe it. Today, the president of the United States met with the bishop of Rome, and I got up early to read about it. In fact, I went on television to talk about it [2].

I know you're thinking: Why on earth would you care about two old white conservative dudes hanging out in some gilded palace to talk about ending abortion and stopping same-sex marriage?

Let me get you up to speed. Barack Obama -- the same guy who gave that rousing speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention -- is president of the United States. He's black and progressive and young-ish. He is pro-choice and has even come out in support of gay marriage.

On the papal side, Pope John Paul II died in 2005 and his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, stepped down last year. So now we have Pope Francis. He's Argentine and a Jesuit and he chose the name Francis. He is focused on being a church of the poor, for the poor, which means he spends most of his time talking about economic justice. He lives simply. He hardly mentions abortion. He's leaving the door open on contraception. And when asked about gay people, he said, "Who am I to judge?"

So this meeting is exciting for a few reasons. In Pope Francis' short time as pope, he has managed to make Catholicism cool again. Especially for progressives. He's always saying something interesting or moving or relevant. He even cursed once [3].

He has also managed to reshift the focus of our church back to issues of economic justice. So we can be pretty sure that this meeting was about that. And in a world where the wealth is concentrated in the hands of far too few while poverty burdens the shoulders of far too many, we need it to be about that.

Pope Francis is having a real impact. Even though he has yet to change much church policy, he has made a change simply by changing his tone. Catholic legislators in Illinois pointed to the pope [4] as the reason they voted for same-sex marriage in their state. Other world leaders have pointed to him for why they want to alleviate poverty or bring about peace.

So now we're having this worldwide conversation about corporate greed and poverty and economic inequality, and Pope Francis is at the center of it. It's incredible, really.

I know you've been quick to brush off the importance of the church hierarchy and what they've had to say. And I know that's because what some members of the hierarchy have said has made you love yourself less. But don't count them all out, because there's this humble cardinal who is going to be pope one day and he's going to put

love above all. And it's going to be contagious.

Pope Francis isn't perfect, and you won't share all his views, and you'll want him to be better, but his imperfection and willingness to admit it is going to make you love him more.

If you're still worried that I've lost all sense of self, know that I still believe that change comes from the ground up, but I'm just excited to see that that change has -- in part, at least -- made its way up. And if you're still looking forward to the struggle, know that the U.S. bishops are leaving plenty of room for that.

Before I sign off, I just want to say that I know that it's hard being at The Catholic University of America. It's making you question your faith and yourself all at once. Know that you're strong enough to make it through and that it's all sunshine and rainbows from here. (Not really *all* sunshine, but you do have a loving partner, an awesome son, great friends, meaningful work and "West Wing" reruns.)

Hang in there, and get excited for Pope Francis.

Love,
Kate

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