

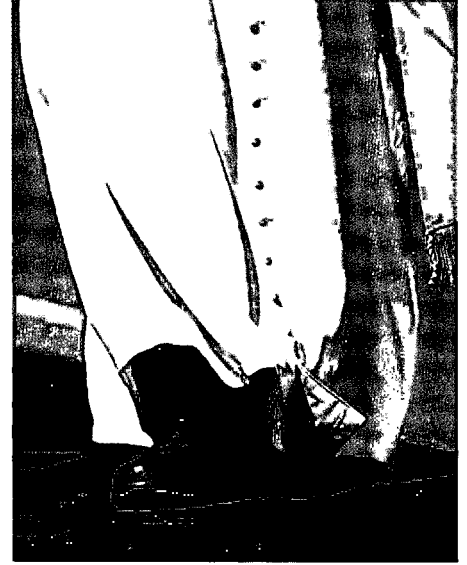
Francis and his simple pectoral cross, not of gold; his simple ring, not of gold; and his ordinary black, not red, shoes



A POPE OF SURPRISES: PRESENTING THE FAITH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

...Though not all the faithful appreciate some of the “surprises”

■ BY THOMAS STORCK



Galazka photos

Whatever the truth of Pope Francis' statement that God is a God of surprises, Francis has certainly been the Pope of surprises. And admittedly not all the Church has received these surprises with appreciation. But there is no question that Francis has raised the profile of the Catholic Church outside the boundaries of the Church, just as did St. John Paul II during his papacy.

Every pontiff has his own style, priorities, strengths and weaknesses. In the confusion about what it means to be a Catholic in the modern world that has followed the Second Vatican Council, I am convinced that what is needed above all is clarity — clarity about what the Church really teaches, about what is expected of Catholics, and perhaps above all, about how Catholics are to integrate their faith into the many and conflicting spiritual, intellectual, political and social currents of today's world.

Many of the writings of Blessed Paul VI, St. John Paul and Benedict XVI, as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, were important steps toward such clarity, and the Catechism particularly is an attractive restatement for the contemporary world of “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” as St. Jude wrote in his epistle in the New Testament (vs. 3).

St. Jude's statement reminds us that public revelation was completed with the death of the last Apostle, St. John, and that although the Church continues to clarify that revelation, nothing really new can be added nor any defined truths changed.

Keeping that in mind, we can appreciate Pope Francis' efforts to present the Church's faith to the world in the way he considers most attractive.

At the same time, we do well to recall that St. Paul, zealous for the purity of the Faith, went so far as to publicly rebuke the then-reigning Pope, none other than St. Peter himself, because by his

ambiguous conduct toward non-Jewish Catholics, Peter seemed to compromise on an essential point of Christian doctrine (see *Galatians* 2:11-14).

Of course, some misinformed Catholics criticize Pope Francis for his statements on social doctrine, statements which are fully in line with those of his predecessors for over a century, or for his pointing out our clear duty to care for the created world, our common home in this life. Here again, Francis is merely reiterating what his predecessors John Paul II and Benedict XVI said on many occasions.

If we are aware that the Church's faith is not the property of any single Catholic, including Christ's Vicar, and if, at the same time, we acquaint ourselves with what the Church actually does teach, then we will have comparatively little difficulty navigating today's troubled ecclesiastical waters.

Confidence in Jesus Christ, the real Head of the Church, a filial respect for his Vicar, accompanied by fervent prayer for him, knowledge and zeal for the Faith once delivered to the saints, as we see such zeal embodied in the life of St. Paul — these should be more than enough to guide any Catholic through this world to the shores of the heavenly world.

For “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.” (I *Corinthians* 13:12)○

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