

“The Pope, the man I know” by Pablo A. Blanco Gonzalez

The election of Pope Francis has shocked the world and the Church itself. From the moment of



his election the media, but especially the faithful and the Church itself have been shocked to see, one by one, the gestures that the new Pastor of the Church shows from the Chair of Peter. Once again it is confirmed the phrase "a gesture is worth a thousand words."

However, I will not stop to analyze the communicative significance of gestures, because this is the matter of specialists. Let me share a brief sketch of the man, the Father Jorge, who I met in Buenos Aires for the first time when I was only 24, today discovered by the media (also the local ones), but discovered by the people of God for a long time ago.

1. The Bishop as Disciple

"May our people sense that we are the Lord's disciples; may they feel that their names are written upon our priestly vestments and that we seek no other identity; and may they receive through our words and deeds the oil of gladness which Jesus, the Anointed One, came to bring us " (Homily for Chrism Mass 2013, Pope Francis).

Monsignor Jorge M. Bergoglio was appointed Bishop of Flores district in Buenos Aires, in May



1992, and usually visit a prayer group of men, encouraged by the diocesan priest Father Telmo Juan de Laurenti, from whom he was a friend and disciple.

That prayer group that continues (and in which I have the happiness of participate) was founded a distant

year of 1973 by Father Telmo Juan de Laurenti, known as "Father Juan". That group began meeting in its origins in a humble house that had been acquired by the Archdiocese in 1972, where masses were held in a room of 3m x 3m.

That house soon became – by the initiative of "Father Juan" – the Pure Heart of Mary Parish. The "Father Juan", as he was known in the neighborhood of Villa Pueyrredón, was an exemplary priest, always having words of comfort and assistance to many needy and who went to the Father's house with Holiness fame at 64 years old, on May 26th, year 2000.

2. Go to the suffering

"Our people like to hear the Gospel preached with "unction", they like it when the Gospel we preach touches their daily lives, when it runs down like the oil of Aaron to the edges of reality, when it brings light to moments of extreme darkness " (Homily for Chrism Mass 2013, Pope Francis).

There was a night when the group visited Monsignor Bergoglio. Already at 11 pm., Bergoglio invited everybody to withdraw to their homes, which we all seemed logical after a hard day activity. To everyone's surprise Monsignor Bergoglio apologized and explained that he must go to the "Plaza de Flores" (Flores Square) to confess "the girls" who worked there.



The Plaza Flores is in front of the Basilica of the same name, and is a very busy and dangerous place, especially at night. Bergoglio usually sat on a park bench in the middle of the night, spiritually accompanying prostitutes working there, even confessing them. Jokingly, he used to say "someday you will figure out what I do, when I appear on the newspapers."

3. Go to the edges

"A priest who seldom goes out of himself, who anoints little – I won't say "not at all" because, thank God, our people take our oil from us anyway – misses out on the best of our people, on what can stir the depths of his priestly heart" (Homily for Chrism Mass 2013, Pope Francis).

Upon the death of Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, Monsignor Bergoglio succeeded to the post of

Archbishop of Buenos Aires on March 1, 1998. "Father Juan" was encouraging a civil association dedicated to children at risk who he founded under the name "Jesus Amigo". That year was inaugurated a convivial home for girls. The home "Mother of Hope" was on the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires, in a lower middle class neighborhood and near a highway.



Monsignor Bergoglio was invited to celebrate mass during the open of the convivial home. No one knew for sure if Bergoglio in his new commitments to the

Church of Buenos Aires would attend. Bergoglio pledged his presence and asked to preside mass in the same street where the home was. On two sawhorses and a plank of wood, an improvised altar was on the side of the street, the whole neighborhood attended mass. The Archbishop of Buenos Aires said at a passage of his homily that "the Church should go and meet people, and not expect people to come to meet the Church".

4. The beauty of signs

"From the beauty of all these liturgical things, which is not so much about trappings and fine fabrics than about the glory of our God resplendent in his people, alive and strengthened, we

turn to a consideration of activity, action" (Homily for Chrism Mass 2013, Pope Francis).

"Padre no es el que engendra un hijo, sino el que da la vida por él. La vida se entrega con generosidad, con ternura, con firmeza, con dedicación, descubriendo lo que el hijo y la familia necesitan. Esta entrega debe ser una necesidad, un crecimiento que nos haga sentir dignos hijos de Dios". Padre Juan



PADRE TELMO JUAN DE LAURENTI
29 DE JULIO DE 1935 – 26 DE MAYO DE 2000

Invitamos a todos a participar de las exequias de quien en vida fuera el Padre Telmo Juan de Laurenti el día 17 de diciembre a las 10,30 hs.

Las mismas se realizarán en la Parroquia Purísimo Corazón de María de la cual fuera cura Párroco y Fundador donde se oficiará una misa que presidirá el Cardenal Jorge Mario Bergoglio recordando a nuestro querido Padre Juan, cumplidos 50 años de su ordenación sacerdotal (10/12/1961- 10/12/2011).

Con posterioridad sus restos mortales se depositaran definitivamente en el atrio, a la par del cinerario parroquial de la Divina Misericordia y al lado de la Virgen de Luján, de la cual era ferviente devoto.

Parroquia Purísimo Corazón de María
Carlos Antonio López 2781 - Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

Eleven years after his death, and as it was his last wish, the remains of the "Father Juan" were finally deposited in the churchyard of his beloved Parish "Pure Heart of Mary" in a mass celebrated by then Cardinal Jorge M. Bergoglio, on December 17th, year 2011. This mass casually coincided with the birthday of the Cardinal himself and the 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of "Father

Juan".

Near the end of mass, Cardinal Bergoglio removed his stole and surprisingly for all us present, laid it on the urn containing the remains of the "Father Juan", telling him that the stole, was from his Cardinals ordination, blessed by John Paul II and that should belong, from now on, to "his friend Juan". We all knew by press reports that in 2005, Bergoglio had the chance to become Pope and had waived that honor. The Cardinal had stripped off one of his last attribute of temporary "power".

People who attended the mass could not hold back the tears. A man, who was beside me, could only say: "This man belongs to another planet".

5. Pray for me

"We need constantly to stir up God's grace and perceive in every request, even those requests that are inconvenient and at times purely material or downright banal – but only apparently so – the desire of our people to be anointed with fragrant oil, since they know that we have it" (Homily for Chrism Mass 2013, Pope Francis).

We went to the Via Crucis of Easter travelling with my wife Veronica on the subway (the Metro of Buenos Aires), and suddenly appears the Cardinal, clad in black, as usual. I raised my hand and said "Hello Father Jorge!", "How are you Pablo?", "Very well, and you Father?", "Send my regards to the prayer group, please!", "Sure Father Jorge, as always!", "Thanks guys, please pray for me ". He gave us his blessing and



a kiss on the cheek. We descended into the station and we walked to the Cathedral, where we said goodbye.

6. He looked at him with mercy, and chose him

The day Cardinal Jorge M. Bergoglio was elected Bishop of Rome, I could not stop crying. Many began to describe stories perhaps even more poignant than mine. That's because Bergoglio



lived among people, not among sextons. He is one like you and me. So, that night of his election, we all got together to celebrate that Pope Francis, was now the Father of all humanity! Finally, I remembered that when Francis appeared at the balcony, my wife with that intuition and sensitivity typical of women's said to me "in his smile it looks God has transfigured him". I replied, "I'm sure many have returned today to be

Catholics ... ", then she answered "Pope Benedict XVI was right when he stated that this was the Year of Faith".