

Evangelisation and the part women can play

Keeping faith and standing up for it.

What Pope Francis' election says to us, committed Catholic women

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Pope's Francis election has been an important event, not just for Rome but for all Catholics. The aim of the following reflections is to try to deepen into the question: What does all that has happened, that is happening, have to say to me, to you?

The following reflections are taken mainly from Pope Francis' daily homilies at the chapel of Casa Santa Marta where he lives. The homilies are oral in style, not written beforehand, he preaches on the readings of the day, after having prayerfully considered them before Mass, and preaches in a language that is not his own – Italian. What we get are transcriptions of these homilies by some journalists that appear both in the websites of L'Osservatore Romano and Radio Vaticana. Even though these texts are not an official Magisterium, they are undoubtedly a source of much spiritual richness for us all!

Below, in italics, are the texts of Pope Francis which will guide our reflections. Where not otherwise indicated notes show the date when he preached that particular homily at Casa Santa Marta.

1. Back to the Core of our Faith

17th March, 2013. First Sunday of Pope Francis' Pontificate. Celebrates Mass at St Anna's Parish, inside the Vatican. His preaching brings to our attention a central theme: Jesus' mercy. A powerful message, a message that takes us to the core of the Gospel.

*Jesus has this message for us: **mercy**. I think – and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy. It was he himself who said: "I did not come for the righteous". The righteous justify themselves. Go on, then, even if you can do it, I cannot! But they believe they can. "I came for sinners" (Mk 2:17). ...*

It is quite powerful that from the very beginning of his pontificate, the new Pope has wanted to bring our attention to the core of the message of the Gospel. There is a real risk for us to be worried and concerned about so many things, themes, problems of our time, problems we see in the world around us, problems within the Church... But here he was, reminding us above all that Jesus brought his mercy to the world, and came above all else to save us through His mercy, to liberate us from our sins and by forgiving us, to give us a chance of a new life.

This theme has touched many people beyond the usual boundaries of practising Catholics, it has reached the hearts of many; God's mercy seems to be a theme especially geared towards the very deeply wounded and suffering men and women of today. But – and this is our challenge throughout this path along Pope Francis' teachings – we will try to bring this preaching to us, what does it say to me, a committed Catholic woman who belongs to WUCWO, who contributes with the best she has... What does this message of God's mercy say to me?

He comes for us, when we recognize that we are sinners. But if we are like the Pharisee, before the altar, who said: I thank you Lord, that I am not like other men, and especially not like the one at the door, like that publican (cf. Lk 18:11-12), then we do not know the Lord's heart, and we will

*never have the joy of experiencing this mercy! It is not easy to entrust oneself to God's mercy, because it is an abyss beyond our comprehension. But we must!... Let us go back to the Lord. The Lord never tires of forgiving: never! It is we who tire of asking his forgiveness.*¹

God's mercy is an abyss beyond our comprehension but the words of the Pope are inviting us to entrust ourselves, our lives, to God's mercy. It is something we *must* do. How do I welcome the message of mercy in my life, today? Have I had, am I having, real experiences of this mercy? Or am I a little like that Pharisee, too pleased with myself, with the work I do... Do I receive this «most powerful message» of the Gospel daily, in my life? How?

When we experience God's mercy for us we are also able to be merciful to others... starting with those closest to us: our family, our neighbours, and carrying on to the people we serve in the projects we are involved with... Are we apostles of this most-powerful message of the Gospel?

1.1. Shame: a truly Christian virtue

Some times his expressions of this outright, clear teaching of Gospel truths come together with witty expressions; like when he said:

*Jesus in the confessional is not a dry cleaner: it is an encounter with Jesus, but with this Jesus who waits for us, who waits for us just as we are.*²

And he takes this opportunity to teach the key role *shame* has in our spiritual life:

*...we are often ashamed to tell the truth: 'I did this, I thought this'. But shame is a true Christian virtue, and even human ... [to have] the ability to be ashamed... to be ashamed is a virtue of the humble... we must have trust, because when we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*³

He links shame with humility and with trust in the love and mercy of Jesus. Shame turns from being an ugly attitude, full of pride and self-pity, to be one that can lead us to conversion, a virtue that throws us into the loving arms of the Father.

*We need to go to Him with our truth as sinners, with confidence, even with joy, without masquerading... We must never masquerade before God. And shame is a virtue: blessed shame. This is the virtue that Jesus asks of us: humility and meekness. Humility and meekness are like the frame of a Christian life.*⁴

Blessed shame, true Christian shame consists in facing with humility the truth of our spiritual life, how we are progressing or not in our daily conversion, how are we living our struggle with our sinfulness. To recognise the evil we have done and to bring it to the furnace of God's love and mercy.

*And Jesus waits for us to forgive us. ... Is going to confession like a torture session? No! It is going to praise God, because I, a sinner, have been saved by Him. And is He waiting for me to beat me? No, with tenderness to forgive me. And if tomorrow I do the same? Go again, and go and go and go He always waits for us. This tenderness of the Lord, this humility, this meekness ...gives us room to breathe.*⁵

¹ Homily at the Holy Mass in the Parish of Saint Anna, Vatican City, 17th March 2013.

² 29th April

³ 29th April

⁴ 29th April

⁵ 29th April

And if we allow Him to embrace us with His mercy, that is the start of the New Life He has promised us. Sometimes it is our pride, our wrong idea of ourselves, that keeps us from salvation. The salvation which can be found only in Jesus Christ.

1.2 The scandal of the Incarnate Word

Pope Francis takes us to the core of the Gospel message with another key teaching that he has taught on several occasions about the centre of the Christian faith and the scandal it proposes for a world that would like us to “be a little bit more normal”...

*“But, be normal, OK? A little more normal, do not be so strict.” But behind this is: “Please, do not come with your tales, about God who became man!” The Incarnation of the Word: that is the scandal behind it!*⁶

It is true that the Incarnation of the Word of God is the greatest scandal. So great, come to think about it, some times even we are scandalized by it, we try to put it aside, not to think too much about it, not to be too “radical” about it; some times we too need to be surprised anew, overwhelmed anew, by this major event: God has become one of us, has assumed in all things our humanity, except sin. This is how valuable humanity is! This is how worthy of love God thinks we are! Amazing...

The Pope carries on:

*We can do all the social work we want, and they will say, “How nice, the Church is what good social work the Church does”. But if we say that we do this because those people we help are the flesh of Christ, there is scandal.*⁷

And

*Always there will be the temptation to do good things without the scandal of the Incarnate Word, without the scandal of the Cross. Instead, we must be true to this scandal, to this reality that scandalises. It is better this way: the coherence of the faith. ... the Church is not a cultural organisation that includes religion and social work.*⁸

The Church is closely linked to this mystery of the Incarnate Word, of Jesus, the Son of God, who has come in the flesh, who founded the Church, the community of His followers, where we can find Him.

We need to make sure our lives, personal and organizational, are giving enough space for these mysteries for here lies the key to who we are, to that which moves our action, this is the foundation of all that WUCWO women have done from the beginning, over 100 years ago, and will be the foundation for continuing the work of Catholic women in today’s world.

So, these are words with which the Pope has taken us to the core of our faith. Am I enrooted enough in these core truths?

⁶ 1st June

⁷ 1st June

⁸ 1st June

2. Being witnesses: the Church

2.1 A love story, not a NGO

The Church. We live in a culture where media and worldly misconceptions tend to influence the idea we have of the Church. Pope Francis has given beautiful images to help us recover this fundamental mystery of our faith.

What is this Church? Because it seems it is not a human enterprise. The Church is something else. The disciples do not make the Church – they are the messengers sent by Jesus. And Christ was sent by the Father: The Church begins there, in the heart of the Father, who had this idea... of love. So this love story began, a story that has gone on for so long, and is not yet ended. We, the women and men of the Church, we are in the middle of a love story: each of us is a link in this chain of love. And if we do not understand this, we have understood nothing of what the Church is.⁹

Not a mere human institution, its origin not in a human project or idea, but in the heart of the Father. Above all, not an institution but a love story! Obviously it requires some institutionalization but let's not forget what is essential and what is instrumental in this reality. Let's try and look at the Church with renewed eyes, eyes of Faith.

2.2 Missionary Church

The central part of the mystery, the love story of the Church is the fact that each one of us has received the enormous gift of our Catholic faith. We have received it in our family, our Parish, through parents, grandparents, family, friends... We would not believe were it not because the Gospel has been preached to us. The Church exists to preach the Gospel. She must «go forth and proclaim the good news to all people». This is the main reason for the existence of the Church, our main task. A mission, a task that involves each and every member of the Church according to his or her own vocation.

Go all over the world. The horizons ... great horizons... And as you can see, this is the mission of the Church. The Church continues to preach this to everyone, all over the world. But she does not go forth alone: she goes forth with Jesus. So they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord acted with them. The Lord works with all those who preach the Gospel.¹⁰

Gospel words are clear, there is a wide, great horizon. The whole world! But not on our own, not at our own pace, but with Jesus acting through us. This brings the Pope to a beautiful meditation on two virtues that would seem opposite, but in reality, must be kept together: magnanimity and humility.

This is the magnanimity that Christians should have. A pusillanimous Christian is incomprehensible; magnanimity is part of the Christian vocation: always more and more, more and more, more and more, always onwards!... The First Letter of St. Peter defines the style of Christian preaching as one of humility: The style of evangelical preaching should have this attitude: humility, service, charity, brotherly love...

Magnanimity to have an attitude of not stopping, going always forth, opening new ways, remembering that the whole world is the destination of Christ's message, every man, every woman. This magnanimity must come together with great humility.

⁹ 24th April

¹⁰ 25th April

A dual disposition, as St. Thomas Aquinas says: a great soul that is not afraid of great things, that moves forward towards infinite horizons, and the humility to take into account the small things. This is divine, it is like a tension between the great and the small and Christian missionary activity proceeds along this path.

He says that this ability to put together two apparently opposite dispositions is “divine”, it has the seal of belonging to God.

Today we ask the Lord to become missionaries in the Church, apostles in the Church but in this spirit: a great magnanimity and also a great humility. So be it.¹¹

2.3 Description of the mission

Let's now take a closer look at how he describes the mission of the Church. Simple, to the point, it seems to respond to many of our reservations, doubts, fears...

Can we who have had the joy of knowing that we are not orphans, that we have a Father, be indifferent to this city which asks of us, perhaps even unwittingly, without being aware of it, a hope that will help it look to the future with greater confidence and serenity? We cannot remain indifferent. But how can we do this? ... With your witness, with your smile, saying: “I believe I have a Father”. This is what Gospel proclamation is: it is saying with my words, with my witness: “I have a Father. We are not orphans. We have a Father”, and this means sharing this kinship with the Father with everyone else.¹²

Sharing this kinship. Making others know, notice, realize, that I have a Father and this Father is also their Father, who loves them too. It is that simple; sometimes it may mean a smile, a charitable phrase, an understanding attitude, a concrete work of charity... But what if it does not work? What if the people do not respond?

The Gospel is like seed: you scatter it, you scatter it with your words and with your witness. and then it is not you who calculates the statistics of the results; it is God who does. It is He who makes this seed germinate but we must sow it with the certainty that He will water it, that He gives the growth. And we do not gather in the harvest. Some other priest will do this, some other lay person, a man or woman, someone else will do it.¹³

As we know, Pope Francis is insisting on the priority of reaching out to the outskirts, a term that he understands widely, to include the poor, first destination of the Gospel message, and different realities of subordination present in our midst...

The Gospel is for everyone! This reaching out to the poor... means we must reach out to the flesh of Jesus that is suffering, but also suffering in the flesh of Jesus of those who do not know it with their study, with their intelligence, with their culture. We must go there! I therefore like using the expression “to go toward the outskirts”, the outskirts of existence. All the outskirts, from physical and real poverty to intellectual poverty, which is also real. All the peripheries, all the crossroads on the way: go there. And sow there the seed of the Gospel with your words and your witness.¹⁴

Here the question for us is: which ones are the outskirts that God calls me to reach out to, that have been entrusted to me. Maybe it is the outskirts of a reality of poverty or exploitation that I can respond to through my charity or my social justice work; maybe it is the outskirts of my family members who live at the margins of the Church and are part of those that do not know they have a

¹¹ 25th April

¹² Address to Participants in the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 17th June 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Father. Maybe it is the periphery of the world of culture, some intellectual or cultural people that live in that intellectual poverty and are seeking hope...

One example was particularly vivid and you may have heard of it; I think it is wittingly true and makes us think... Go directly to his own words:

I want to tell you something. There is a beautiful passage of the Gospel which tells us about the shepherd who, when he returned to the sheepfold realized that one sheep was missing. He left the 99 others and went in search of it, he went off to look for one. But brothers and sisters, we have one sheep. We have lost the other 99! We must go out, we must go out to them! In this culture — let us tell the truth — we are only one, we are a minority! And do we feel the fervour, the apostolic zeal to go out and find the other 99?

He has spoken to priests, and to Bishops about being shepherds, but now in this speech, together with the very clear example of the 99 sheep that are out of the sheepfold, he is inviting US to feel the zeal, the yearning, the «generosity, courage and patience to go out» with humility and magnanimity to find those other 99. It is quite meaningful that he entrusts this mission to all baptized, we laity are fully committed to this too, we might be tempted to think this is a responsibility for priests, instead of what am I to do. Let's carry on...

We must ask the Lord for the grace of generosity, and the courage and patience to go out, to go out and preach the Gospel. Ah, this is difficult. It is easier to stay at home, with that one sheep! It is easier with that sheep to comb its fleece, to stroke it... but we priests and you Christians too, everyone: the Lord wants us to be shepherds, he does not want us to fuss with combing fleeces! Shepherds! And when a community is withdrawn, always among the same people who speak together, this community is not a life-giving community. It is barren, it is not fertile. The fecundity of the Gospel comes through the grace of Jesus Christ, but also through us, our preaching, our courage, our patience.¹⁵

Another striking theme that has come out on other occasions is about communities that are withdrawn, closed in on themselves, «always among the same people» speaking among themselves... not giving life, barren! With all honesty and courage, how many times is my own community, association, women's organization, a little like that too? Let's try not to think how well he is describing others... let's try to face in what ways those words apply to us.

2.4 God has called me, the responsibility of our Baptism

The vocation proper of the laity, the apostolate of the laity. Powerful teachings of the Second Vatican Council that we are still far away from living to the full. Pope Francis' words refer to this and re-launch this most important theme...

...those early Christians had nothing but the power of baptism that gave them their apostolic courage, the strength of the Spirit... I think of us, the baptized: do we really have this strength — and I wonder — do we really believe in this? Is Baptism enough? Is it sufficient for evangelization? Or do we rather 'hope' that the priest should speak, that the bishop might speak ... and what of us?¹⁶

Some times it is us, the engaged Catholics, who are most affected by clericalism, who would rather prefer to leave certain tasks to the priest or the bishop; us who speak of "the Church", the things the Church has to change, to do better... as if I was not an integral part of it! As if it was not up to me too to change!

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 17th April

*Sometimes we think: 'We are Christians, I was baptized, I was Confirmed, made my First Communion... I have my identity card alright. And now, go to sleep quietly, you are a Christian. But where is this power of the Spirit that carries us forward?... we need to be faithful to the Spirit, to proclaim Jesus with our lives, through our witness and our words... Let us reflect on our Baptism, on the responsibility of our Baptism. There is a great responsibility for us, the baptized: to proclaim Christ, to carry the Church – this fruitful motherhood of the Church – forward.'*¹⁷

Reflect on our Baptism, on the responsibility of our Baptism; Baptism is an immense gift which also implies an immense responsibility. The Pope states it plainly enough: to proclaim Christ, to carry the Church forward, that is my responsibility, not just a clerical responsibility, a responsibility that comes with Baptism. Understanding this is the true spirit of the Church of Vatican II, the superation of clericalism.

A beautiful definition – explanation of Baptism:

*Baptism... is a revolution. There have been so many revolutionaries in history, many indeed. Yet none of them have had the force of this revolution which brought Jesus to us: a revolution to transform history, a revolution that changes the human heart in depth. The revolutions of history have changed political and economic systems but none have really changed the human heart.*¹⁸

Our hearts have been changed deeply by this revolution:

*The Prophet Ezekiel said he would take out the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. What does this mean? A heart that loves, a heart that suffers, a heart that rejoices with others, a heart filled with tenderness for those scarred from the injuries of life, those who feel they are on the fringes of society. Love is the greatest power for the transformation of reality because it pulls down the walls of selfishness and fills the ditches that keep us apart. This is the love that comes from a mutated heart, from a heart of stone that has been turned into a heart of flesh, a human heart.*¹⁹

Hearts that are capable of love, of consolation, of mercy, of tenderness. Hearts that are aware above all of the love with which they have been loved, of the consolation they are offered every day, of the mercy with which they have been forgiven, of the tenderness with which they are looked at by the Father of Mercies. And through this love received because of Baptism these hearts become from stone into hearts of flesh. How needy is our society, our Europe, of people like this, of this revolution of love!

*In this day and age unless Christians are revolutionaries they are not Christians. They must be revolutionaries through grace! Grace itself, which the Father gives us through the crucified, dead and risen Jesus Christ makes us revolutionaries because — and once again I cite Benedict XVI — “he is the greatest mutation in the history of humanity” because he changes the heart.*²⁰

Our hearts have been changed, we have been made temples of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit moves us, drives us, if we allow Him, if we do not resist Him.

2.5 Openness to the Holy Spirit

But things are not easy. The Pope tells us that allowing the Holy Spirit to take the lead in our lives is not always easy. He warns us: some times we fear the Holy Spirit, we fear the will of God.

¹⁷ 17th April

¹⁸ Address to Participants in the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 17th June 2013.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

*The problem and temptation is that we cannot control the Holy Spirit... the law of the Spirit, takes us on a path of continuous discernment to do the will of God and this can frighten us... We cannot control the Holy Spirit: that is the problem!*²¹

On another occasion he went even further, to say that the Holy Spirit not only scares us...

*Actually, to say it clearly, the Holy Spirit annoys us. Because he moves us he makes us journey, he pushes the Church to go forward. And we are like Peter at the Transfiguration: 'Oh, how wonderful it is for us to be here, all together!' But let it not inconvenience us. We would like the Holy Spirit to doze off. We want to subdue the Holy Spirit.*²²

So, we too might be prone to this temptation: not wanting to be inconvenienced by the Holy Spirit; being all too pleased with ourselves, with the things we do, the projects we undertake, that we have Him under control, stopping him from moving us ahead, to greater love, greater service of God and men!

More questions for us, sisters. Do I fear the Holy Spirit? Do I resist Him? Do I find myself, my organization, suffering from this resistance, this attachment to what is established, this difficulty to be open to what is new, resistance to a voice outside ourselves, precisely the voice of the Holy Spirit, even if it is pushing us ahead in the service of God and men, to undertake unknown, unexplored paths?

But the Holy Spirit has another fundamental role the Pope presents to us: his role in the memory of our spiritual life. The Holy Spirit is:

*God who helps us remember, who awakens our memory. Jesus himself explains this to the Apostles before Pentecost: the Spirit that God will send in my name, will remind you of everything I have said. The opposite would lead the Christian down a dangerous path. A Christian without memory is not a true Christian: he or she is a prisoner of circumstance, of the moment, a man or woman who has no history. He or she does have a history, but does not know how to enter into history. It is the Spirit that teaches us how to enter into history...*²³

The Holy Spirit pushes always ahead, to serve more, to love more, but remaining rooted in our identity, our history, who we are, that history that has been transformed because the Son of God entered in it to transform it, and our own personal history, where Jesus Christ has been present, having chosen us, leading us in our path. Let's once again listen to Pope Francis himself:

*When in the Letter to the Hebrews, the author says: 'Remember your fathers in the faith' – memory; 'remember the early days of your faith, how you were courageous' – memory. A memory of our life, of our history, a memory of the moment when we had the grace of meeting Jesus, the memory of all that Jesus has told us. That memory that comes from the heart, that is a grace of the Holy Spirit*²⁴.

But this memory has to be complete...

*Remembering also means remembering one's own misery, that which makes us slaves, and together with them, the grace of God that redeems us from our miseries: And when a little vanity creeps in, when someone believes themselves to be a winner of the 'Nobel Prize for Holiness,' then memory is also good for us: 'But ... remember where I took you from, the very least of the flock. You were behind, in the flock.'*²⁵

²¹ 12th June

²² 16th April

²³ 11th May

²⁴ 11th May

²⁵ 11th May

Memory of our origins, of our misery too, memory roots us and makes us firm in our identity. So memory saves us from taking the wrong path, from following a new path which is our own, not God's.

Memory is a great grace, and when a Christian has no memory – this is a hard thing, but it's true – he is not a Christian, he is an idolater. Because he is before a God that has no road, that does not know how to move forward on the road. Our God is moving forward on the road with us, He is among us, He walks with us. He saves us. He makes history with us. Be mindful of all that, and life becomes more fruitful, with the grace of memory.²⁶

We have then to pray to God for this real, true, openness to the Holy Spirit, that pushes us towards what is new without fear, but without making us take paths that separate us from Him, without uprooting us from our history, which is the personal history of grace in each one of our lives but also the history of grace of the Church as a whole, of which we are all part. Not least of all, the history of grace of our organizations, like for example the history of grace that made possible the foundation of WUCWO over 100 years ago, and that has accompanied the strong and important work that women have undertaken in the midst of the Church throughout its history. Being deeply rooted in that most interesting history will give new light to the mission WUCWO has to undertake today.

2.6 Courageous witnesses

He knows our times are not easy for Christian faithful; he speaks of our faith:

What is our faith like? Is it strong? Or is it at times a little like rosewater, a somewhat watered down faith? When problems arise are we brave like Peter or inclined to be lukewarm? Peter teaches us that faith is not negotiable. Among the People of God this temptation has always existed: to downsize faith.²⁷

To put too much emphasis on “being like everyone else” is a start to apostasy! To betraying our faith. Let's see how he unfolds this idea:

Indeed, when we begin to cut faith down, to negotiate faith and more or less to sell it to the one who makes the best offer, we are setting out on the road of apostasy, of no fidelity to the Lord. Yet the very example of Peter and John helps us, gives us strength; as does the example of the martyrs in the Church's history. It is they who say, like Peter and John, ‘we cannot but speak’. And this gives strength to us, whose faith is at times rather weak. It gives us the strength to carry on living with this faith we have received, this faith which is the gift that the Lord gives to all peoples.²⁸

He knows some times it can be hard, it can be tough. He encourages us to look at the example of the apostles, the martyrs... But let's note a small word that, I think, gives us the clue to understanding all this; the faith is not something we have given ourselves, a choice we have made... it is a «faith we have received», a gift, that has been transmitted to us and we must transmit to others ourselves, undefiled, in all its integrity.

The Pope ended by suggesting a daily prayer:

Lord, thank you so much for my faith. Preserve my faith, increase it. May my faith be strong and courageous. And help me in the moments when, like Peter and John, I must make it public.²⁹

²⁶ 11th May

²⁷ 7th April

²⁸ 7th April

²⁹ 7th April

3. Elements for an examination of conscience

3.1 Christians without Christ

The Pope tells us there are various categories, he reflected particularly on two of them:

[First] the “light Christian”, who, instead of loving the rock, loves beautiful words, and turns towards a god of froth,... with attitudes of superficiality and flimsiness... superficial Christians who indeed believe in God, but not in Jesus Christ, the One who gives you a foundation... they give into the temptation of a fluid Christianity.³⁰

He calls this first type “the modern Gnostics” taking back the name of a very widely diffused heretic group of the early centuries of the Church. Superficiality, a God “of froth”, a certain presence, a certain something but not really the personal God who has loved us in such a real, concrete, incarnate, historical way in his Only Son Jesus Christ.

A second category is formed by:

...those who believe that Christian life must be taken so seriously that they end by confusing solidity and firmness with rigidity. These rigid Christians think that to be a Christian it is necessary to wear mourning, and always take everything seriously, paying attention to formalities, just as the scribes and Pharisees did... They are today's Pelagians who believe in the firmness of faith and are convinced that salvation is the way I do things.³¹

And “the modern Pelagians” make another category: too serious, rigid, attached to formalities, but above all, with the pride of making themselves the measure of Christianity: salvation is the way I do things!

These examples may seem a little extreme, but... if we look carefully, and once again, not only around us, not only at others, let's look at ourselves too. He comments about these groups of people:

They are not Christians. They disguise themselves as Christians ... [they] do not know Jesus,... they do not know what the rock is, they have none of the freedom of Christians. Consequently, they have no joy... And in addition to having no joy, they have no freedom either. In their life there is no room for the Holy Spirit.³²

Which one is the rock upon which my life, my organization, is built? Where have I put my life's foundations? Am I open to the scandal of a personal God that personally knows and loves me? Do I seek to be in communion, close contact, a growing relationship with Him? In His presence?

3.2 Compromise

Pope Francis has warned in different occasions of the dangers and difficulties of what he calls a “mundane Church”. This happens when we, the living bricks that make up the Church, prone to temptations and falls, try to compromise our faith in order to be more acceptable, to take away the scandal that our faith, our Crucified and Risen Lord, cause...

³⁰ 27th June

³¹ 27th June

³² 27th June

*We make a pact, a little of God and a little of you. We make this pact and we go forward in life with a double life: a little bit of the life that Jesus tells us about and a little of the life that the world, the forces of the world that many others tell us about. This is a system that's no good.*³³

These compromises separate us from Jesus, prevent us from listening to His voice, from truly following Him.

*... the Church invites us to take Jesus' path and not to listen to the world's proposals, the so-so proposals, the half and half proposals. They are a way of living that is not right and they won't make us happy. In choosing to obey God and not the world, in giving no way to compromise, the Christian is not alone.*³⁴

When we are «reasonable Christians», «social Christians»³⁵ we limit Christianity to philanthropy but miss the faith in the Son of God made flesh, crucified and truly resurrected.

How does this worldliness affect me, my organization? How can we live more in openness to the true spirit of the Gospel? Are we fearful, do we seek compromise?

3.3 Adolescent progressivism

This is the name the Pope has given to another one of the temptations for Catholics today; he explains that it is a progressivism that de-rails us, as we said earlier, leads us to seek change without the necessary roots of our history! But let's see how the Pope himself speaks about what it is:

*This temptation lies in seeing a culture and ...[taking] the values of this culture a little bit from here, a little bit from there... They want to make this law? Alright let's go ahead and make this law. Let's broaden the boundaries here a little. In the end, let me tell you, this is not true progress. It is adolescent progressivism: just like teenagers who in their enthusiasm want to have everything and in the end? You slip up... It's like when the road is covered in ice and the car slips and goes off track...*³⁶

He said this temptation has its counterpart in those Christians who hate progress or see it always as a threat. Again, the key is always the Holy Spirit.

*We, at this moment in the history of the Church, we cannot go backwards or go off the track! ... the track is that of freedom in the Holy Spirit that makes us free, in continuous discernment of God's will to move forward on this path, without going back and without going off-track. Let us ask the Lord for the grace that the Holy Spirit gives us to go forward.*³⁷

3.4 Disheartened Christians

Here the Pope touches on a really painful spot! I think very few of us can say: this one I am really free of.

Paul VI used to say that he did not understand disheartened Christians... those sad and anxious Christians who make one wonder whether they believe in God or in "the goddess of complaint". One never knows. Day in day out they complain, they moan; and see how the world is going, look

³³ 12th April

³⁴ 12th April

³⁵ 1st June

³⁶ 12th June

³⁷ 12th June

*what disasters, what disasters. But think: the world is no worse than it was five centuries ago! The world is the world; it always was the world.*³⁸

It's with striking clarity that he says it; these attitudes are simply contradictory to faith in a living God that has defeated sin and death! They are!

*Christians must be brave. In facing a problem, in facing a social or religious crisis they must have the courage to move onwards, to go ahead bravely. And when nothing can be done, patiently: putting up with it. Tolerating. Courage and patience, these two virtues of Paul. Courage: moving ahead, bearing a forceful witness: onwards! Putting up with things: bearing on our shoulders the things that cannot yet be changed. but moving forward with this patience, with this patience that grace gives us.*³⁹

Beautiful teaching! Touches on a painful spot but lovingly gives us light and hope to discover what we can do, maybe which virtues we are lacking and how can we seek more openness to the Lord, the faith, so as to be truly Christians, not worshippers of some goddess of complaint. Courage and patience.

Hope-filled courage that helps us move, act, do what needs to be done. But how important that when we cannot change things, there is another truly Christian path, not endless complaint but patience, *hypomoné*:

*Being patient ... This does not mean being sad. No, no, it's another thing! This means bearing, carrying the weight of difficulties, the weight of contradictions, the weight of tribulations on our shoulders. This Christian attitude of bearing up: of being patient. That which is described in the Bible by a Greek word, that is so complete, *Hypomoné*, in life bearing every day tasks; contradictions; tribulations, all of this.*⁴⁰

It is the patience of putting up with difficult, complex situations and also with one another. The Pope says this is a virtue that prevents us from becoming old, hardened in our spirit, it keeps us young!

*The patient person is the one who, in the long run, is younger! Just think of those elderly people in the hospices, those who have endured so much in life: Look at their eyes, young eyes, they have a youthful spirit and a renewed youth. And the Lord invites us to this: to be rejuvenated Easter people on a journey of love, patience, enduring our tribulations and also – I would say – putting up with one another...*⁴¹

4. Women in the Church

After the words Pope Francis pronounced in the context of his trip to Brazil we cannot but add a word about this, a theme that interests us all. You may have read many comments, I think the Pope's words are a great encouragement for all of us, it is important to remember the oral context, but to read them directly, not only comments about them.

And it is important to note some crucial passages:

I believe that we have much more to do in making explicit this role and charism of women. We can't imagine a Church without women, but women active in the Church, with the distinctive role that they play. ... this is how we should think of women: taking risky decisions, yet as women. This needs to be better explained. I believe that we have not yet come up with a profound theology of

³⁸ Address to Participants in the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 17th June 2013.

³⁹ Address to Participants in the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 17th June 2013.

⁴⁰ 7th May

⁴¹ 7th May

womanhood, in the Church. All we say is: they can do this, they can do that, now they are altar servers, now they do the readings, they are in charge of Caritas (Catholic charities). But there is more! We need to develop a profound theology of womanhood. That is what I think.

Later on, to a second journalist who explicitly asked about women's ordination to the priesthood:

I would like to explain a bit more what I said about women's participation in the Church. It can't just be about their acting as altar servers, heads of Caritas, catechists... No! They have to be more, profoundly more, even mystically more, along with everything I said about the theology of womanhood. And, as far as women's ordination is concerned, the Church has spoken and said: "No". John Paul II said it, but with a definitive formulation. That door is closed, but on this issue I want to tell you something. I have said it, but I repeat it. Our Lady, Mary, was more important than the Apostles, than bishops and deacons and priests. Women, in the Church, are more important than bishops and priests; how, this is something we have to try to explain better, because I believe that we lack a theological explanation of this. Thank you.

We will certainly look forward to further developments on these ideas. I think some keys for us to enter the Pope's mind in saying all this could be:

- He wants to promote women *qua* women, not in some sort of competition with men. Women active in the Church with their distinctive role. Courageous, risky; but feminine.
- He sees the need to explain this role better, thus the call for a theology of womanhood. I believe a theology of this sort – in my interpretation of the Holy Father's words – should be based on Pope John Paul II's teachings; indeed his teachings (*Mulieris dignitatem*, *Letter to women*, ...) are more of a theological anthropology: who is the woman, the man, the common dignity, the differences, etc. But more needs to be said or developed of the specific role of femininity in the Church, *making explicit this role and charism of women... .*
- However, he is speaking of something that goes beyond what has been said so far: they can be readers, they can be presidents of Caritas... a theological role, a mystical role. Not less important.
- This needs to be explained better and maybe also better lived...?

Still only six months of pontificate, hopefully we will get more developments on this soon. Other words he has said so far:

- Women's fundamental role on passing on the faith. He has even quoted his own personal history with his grandmother. He spoke of the fundamental role of women as witnesses of the Resurrection.
- What can WUCWO do? What part can you play? What is your role in the development of such a *theology of womanhood*?
- We must above all contribute being and living like daughters of the Church. Contribute from within, with a filial spirit, in communion.
- Mary, the women saints teach us. There is no other way...