

Pope Francis and Loving Service

- Introduction
 - The fundamental reform of the Church, according to Pope Francis, is to allow the Lord once again to shape us to an evangelizing Church. The Church doesn't have a mission, but *is* a mission. Pope Francis says in his apostolic exhortation that none of us has a mission, but each of us similarly is a mission. "I am a mission," Pope Francis writes. And that mission we are involves going to preach the Gospel to the peripheries, not just in terms of geography but those who are left on the margins of existence. It means preaching the Gospel to the poor, to the unwanted, to the discarded, and abandoned. It means not inviting those who can repay us, but the "poor, crippled, lame and blind" who cannot repay us (Lk 14:13).
 - The fundamental corruption of the Church, he has been saying since before his election, is when the Church gets so focused on herself, on those who are already coming, on those who are already contributing, that we forget about others. We care for the sheep in the fold, but don't care adequately at all for those people who are suffering enormously.
 - In this, as in everything, Pope Francis is trying to lead not principally by words, but by his body language. He himself has been going to the peripheries:
 - He's gone to refugee centers where those who are treated and even called "aliens" as if they were from another planet, are often subjected to terrible conditions.
 - He's gone to jail, to care for incarcerated teens in whom no one has much hope for reform.
 - He's gone to children's hospitals, to care for those who are sufferings.
 - He's gone to poor villages and even poor homes in order to bring hope to the poor.
 - He's identified with the poor, living very simply both before and after his papal election, taking simple transportation, identifying very much with the poor and simple he's trying to serve.
 - He's changed the papal almoner's office to go out actively and find the poor and help them in concrete ways.
 - He's gone out into the crowd not in search of the royalty or celebrities, but for those who the world not only considers nobodies but burdens. He's embraced handicapped adults and kids. He's allowed a Down's teen to ride in the pope mobile with him.
 - In one of the most iconic scenes of his papacy, he embraced even those whom charitable people would find physically revolting.
 - Story of Vinicio Rivas with neurofibromitotic tumors This man, 53, is from the Italian town of Vicenza and he's suffered a lifetime of hurt and misunderstanding because of his being covered from head to toe with growths, swellings and itchy sores that bleed into his clothes each day.
 - In early November, he traveled with his aunt and others from Vicenza to the Vatican. He was in a wheelchair and the Swiss guard kept ushering him forward.
 - His Aunt, Caterina Lotto, said, "When we came close to us, I thought he would give me his hand. Instead he went straight to Vinicio and embraced him tightly. I thought he wouldn't give him back to me he held him so tightly. We didn't spea. We said nothing but he looked at me as if he was digging deep inside, a beautiful look that I would never have expected."
 - Vinicio said, "He didn't have any fear of my illness. ... I'm not contagious, but [the pope] didn't know that. But he did it, period. He caressed my whole face and while he was doing it, I felt only love. ... It lasted a little longer than a minute, but it felt as

if it were eternity. ... I quivered. I felt great warmth.” It brought about a great change in him. “I feel stronger and happier. I feel I can move ahead because the Lord is protecting me.”

- When he hasn't been able to get out himself, he has used his cell phone still to reach.
 - He called Carlos Samaria, his 81-year-old cobbler in Buenos Aires, to inquire about his shoe repair and to let him know that someone else would be retrieving his footwear.
 - He telephoned his newspaperman, Daniel del Regno, to cancel his subscription and to thank him for delivering the newspaper to him for so many years.
 - He called his Argentine dentist to cancel the appointment he would no longer be able to keep.
 - He famously tried to call the Superior General of the Jesuits, but the young Jesuit at the switchboard didn't believe he was the Pope and said he was tempted to respond, “And I'm Napoleon!”
 - It's becoming clear, however, that Pope Francis has found another type of use for the phone. He's using it as a bridge to reach out to those in need on the fringes.
 - On August 7, he called Michele Ferri, who had written him for prayers because he was finding it impossible to forgive the two men who had murdered his brother Andrea in Pesaro, Italy. Pope Francis called him, told him he cried reading his letter, comforted him about the death of his brother, encouraged him to forgive, and then asked to speak to his mother to extend to her his deepest sympathies.
 - On August 18, he phoned Stefano Cabizza, a 19-year old computer engineer from Padua worried about finding a job after graduation. He had passed a note to a Cardinal at the Pope's Mass on the Solemnity of the Assumption. The Pope called three times before reaching Stefano. In an eight minute conversation full of laughter, he filled Stefano with hope, encouraging him to refer to him in the informal “tu” as friends are accustomed to address each other.
 - On August 25, he phoned Alejandra Pereyra, a 44-year-old Argentinian mother of six who had written him describing that she had been raped by a police officer at gunpoint in his cruiser, but that the police department is covering up the rape and actually promoted the officer in question. Pope Francis spent a half-hour with her patiently listening to her story. He encouraged her to be calm and reminded her that she was not alone. She said the encounter gave her back her faith, her confidence and the courage to continue seeking justice.
 - On Nov 1, he called a fierce critic of his liturgical practices, Mario Palmaro, thanked him for his criticism and told him he was praying for him as he battled with a terminal diagnosis of cancer.. Palmaro said, ““I was astonished, amazed, above all moved: for me, as a Catholic, that which I was experiencing was one of the most beautiful experiences in my life.” When the writer tried to clarify the motivations for his recent work, the pope cut him off. The Pope almost did not let me finish the sentence,” Mr. Palmaro. The pontiff said “that he had understood that those criticisms had been made with love, and how important it had been for him to receive them.
 - Perhaps the most moving of all happened September 3. Pope Francis called Anna Romano, a 35-year old Roman whose boyfriend, after she told him she was pregnant, divulged he was married and tried to persuade her to have an abortion. She wrote in anguish to the Pope asking for prayers. He called, spoke to her as friend, mentioned how “strong and brave” she was, and as she told an Italian newspaper, “reassured me, telling me that the baby was a gift from God, a sign of Providence. He told me I would not be left alone.” After she said she was worried that because she's a divorcée her baby might not be able to be baptized, Pope Francis told her he was sure she would be surely find a willing pastor, “but if not, you know there's always

me!”

- He’s not in doing this as a conventional liberal or conservative, to use the political categories that never really fit anyone in the Church. But he’s not pushing for the government to find a solution to everything. He’s, rather, telling us to give them something to eat. And he’s also not saying that it has to happen all by private charity, saying rather, it’s a thing of justice and that individual handouts are never going to suffice.
- To many, especially in affluent areas of the west, while his example is inspiring, his words are really challenging. He is truly seeking to get us to love our neighbor in deeds, rather than just talk about loving our neighbor.
- What I’d like to do in this conference is tackle how he’s seeking to reform the whole Church and all of us in the Church to make our love for neighbor more practical. He’s convinced that this is essential for the reform of the Church and for the fulfillment of the mission that is the Church.
- He has stressed that structural reform of the Church comes after a change in attitude to make the whole Church a Good Samaritan rather than bureaucrats.
 - (Spadaro interview, Sept 19) How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary — that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind.
- In his homily at his inaugural Mass, he stressed that authentic power is service
 - March 19 Homily: Certainly, Jesus Christ conferred power upon Peter, but what sort of power was it? Jesus’ three questions to Peter about love are followed by three commands: feed my lambs, feed my sheep. Let us never forget that authentic power is service, and that the Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the Cross. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Only those who serve with love are able to protect!
- This is a service that all of us must seek to give, but those of us who take the faith more seriously, to whom more has been given, are even more summoned to this service by the Lord and should seek to do it from their heart.
 - (March 28 Casal del Marmo) [Jesus] himself explains to his disciples: “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:12-15). It is the Lord’s example: he is the most important, and he washes feet, because with us what is highest must be at the service of others. This is a symbol, it is a sign, right? Washing feet means: “I am at your service”. And with us too, don’t we have to wash each other’s feet day after day? But what does this mean? That all of us must help one another. ... Help one another: this is what Jesus teaches us and this what I am doing, and doing with all my heart, because it is my duty. As a priest and a bishop, I must be at your service. But it is a duty which comes from my heart: I love it. I love this and I love to do it because that is what the Lord has taught me to do. ... Now we will perform this ceremony of washing feet, and let us think, let each one of us think: “Am I really willing, willing to serve, to help others?”. Let us think about this, just this. And let us think that this sign is a caress of Jesus, which Jesus gives, because this is the real reason why Jesus came: to serve, to help us.

- This type of service comes from a new form of hearing. If we're truly listening to the voice of the Lord, then, with him, we'll hear the cry of the poor, the cry of our brothers and sisters in need — and cry with them.
 - (Lampedusa, July 8, 2013) God's two questions echo even today, as forcefully as ever! How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don't care; we don't protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another! And when humanity as a whole loses its bearings, it results in tragedies like the one we have witnessed.
 - "Where is your brother?" His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! Once again I thank you, the people of Lampedusa, for your solidarity. I recently listened to one of these brothers of ours. Before arriving here, he and the others were at the mercy of traffickers, people who exploit the poverty of others, people who live off the misery of others. How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here.
 - "Where is your brother?" Who is responsible for this blood? In Spanish literature we have a comedy of Lope de Vega that tells how the people of the town of Fuente Ovejuna kill their governor because he is a tyrant. They do it in such a way that no one knows who the actual killer is. So when the royal judge asks: "Who killed the governor?", they all reply: "Fuente Ovejuna, sir". Everybody and nobody! Today too, the question has to be asked: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? Nobody! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me. Yet God is asking each of us: "Where is the blood of your brother which cries out to me?" Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul...!", and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business
 - "Adam, where are you?" "Where is your brother?" These are the two questions which God asks at the dawn of human history, and which he also asks each man and woman in our own day, which he also asks us. But I would like us to ask a third question: "Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?" Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society that has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – "suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! In the Gospel we have heard the crying, the wailing, the great lamentation: "Rachel weeps for her children... because they are no more". Herod sowed death to protect his own comfort, his own soap bubble. And so it continues... Let us ask the Lord to remove the part of Herod that lurks in our hearts; let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. "Has any one wept?" Today has anyone wept in our world?
- God's world is one in which we take responsibility for others
 - (Syria Vigil, Sept 7) God's world is a world where everyone feels responsible for the other, for the good of the other. This evening, in reflection, fasting and prayer, each of us deep down should ask ourselves: Is this really the world that I desire? Is this really the world that we all carry in our hearts? But then we wonder: Is this the world in which we are living?... When man thinks only of himself,

of his own interests and places himself in the center, when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God's place, then all relationships are broken and everything is ruined; then the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict. This is precisely what the passage in the Book of Genesis seeks to teach us in the story of the Fall. It is exactly in this chaos that God asks man's conscience: "Where is Abel your brother?" and Cain responds: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). We too are asked this question, it would be good for us to ask ourselves as well: Am I really my brother's keeper? Yes, you are your brother's keeper! To be human means to care for one another! But when harmony is broken, a metamorphosis occurs: the brother who is to be cared for and loved becomes an adversary to fight, to kill. What violence occurs at that moment, how many conflicts, how many wars have marked our history! We need only look at the suffering of so many brothers and sisters. This is not a question of coincidence, but the truth: **we bring about the rebirth of Cain in every act of violence and in every war. All of us!** And even today we continue this history of conflict between brothers, even today we raise our hands against our brother. Even today, we let ourselves be guided by idols, by selfishness, by our own interests, and this attitude persists. We have perfected our weapons, our conscience has fallen asleep, and we have sharpened our ideas to justify ourselves. As if it were normal, we continue to sow destruction, pain, death! Violence and war lead only to death, they speak of death! Violence and war are the language of death!

- We must make our neighbor's welfare part of our business
 - (July 24, Visit to St. Francis of Assisi Hospital in Rio) In the Gospel, we read the parable of the Good Samaritan, that speaks of a man assaulted by robbers and left half dead at the side of the road. People pass by him and look at him. But they do not stop, they just continue on their journey, indifferent to him: it is none of their business! How often we say: it's not my problem! How often we turn the other way and pretend not to see! Only a Samaritan, a stranger, sees him, stops, lifts him up, takes him by the hand, and cares for him (cf. Lk 10:29-35).
- Jesus calls us to this type of charity. We will be judged by our charity.
 - (Nov 27, 2013 Catechesis) Against this horizon we understand Jesus' invitation to be ever ready, watchful, knowing that life in this world is given to us also in order to prepare us for the afterlife, for life with the heavenly Father. And for this there is a sure path: preparing oneself well for death, staying close to Jesus. This is surety: I prepare myself for death by staying close to Jesus. And how do we stay close to Jesus? Through prayer, in the Sacraments and also in the exercise of charity. Let us remember that he is present in the weakest and the most needy. He identified himself with them, in the well known parable of the Last Judgment, in which he says: "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'" (Mt 25:35-36, 40). Therefore, a sure path comes by recovering the meaning of Christian charity and fraternal sharing, by caring for the bodily and spiritual wounds of our neighbor. Solidarity in sharing sorrow and infusing hope is a premise and condition for receiving as an inheritance that Kingdom which has been prepared for us. The one who practices mercy does not fear death. Think well on this: the one who practices mercy does not fear death! Do you agree? Shall we say it together so as not to forget it? The one who practices mercy does not fear death. And why does he not fear it? Because he looks death in the face in the wounds of his brothers and sisters, and he overcomes it with the love of Jesus Christ. If we will open the door of our lives and hearts to our littlest brothers and sisters, then even our own death will become a door that introduces us to heaven, to the blessed homeland, toward which we are directed, longing to dwell forever with God our Father, with Jesus, with Our Lady and with the Saints.
- When we give alms, we should do so respecting the other's dignity
 - (May 18 Pentecost Vigil with Ecclesial Movements) When I go to hear confessions – I still can't, because to go out to hear confessions... from here it's impossible to go out, but that's another problem — when I used to go to hear confessions in my previous diocese, people would come to me and I would always ask them: "Do you give alms?" — "Yes, Father!" "Very good." And I would

ask them two further questions: “Tell me, when you give alms, do you look the person in the eye?” “Oh I don’t know, I haven’t really thought about it”. The second question: “And when you give alms, do you touch the hand of the person you are giving them to or do you toss the coin at him or her?” This is the problem: the flesh of Christ, touching the flesh of Christ, taking upon ourselves this suffering for the poor. Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us.

- Loving our neighbor ultimately demands giving our life for them.
 - (May 14 homily) The Pope commented on the day’s Readings, recalling that in this time of waiting for the Holy Spirit, the idea of love returns, the new Commandment. “Jesus says something remarkable to us: ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’. Love always takes this path: to give one’s life. To live life as a gift, a gift to be given — not a treasure to be stored away. And Jesus lived it in this manner, as a gift. And if we lives life as a gift, we does what Jesus wanted: ‘I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit’”. So, we must not burn out life with selfishness.
- The Christmas mystery teaches us to humble ourselves and put ourselves at others service. Whatever we do to others we do to Jesus.
 - (Dec 18, 2013 Catechesis) We may derive two considerations from the joyous contemplation of the mystery of the Son of God born for us. The first is that if God, in the Christmas mystery, reveals himself not as One who remains on high and dominates the universe, but as the One who bends down, descends to the little and poor earth, it means that, to be like him, we should not put ourselves above others, but indeed lower ourselves, place ourselves at the service of others, become small with the small and poor with the poor. It is regrettable to see a Christian who does not want to lower himself, who does not want to serve. A Christian who struts about is ugly: this is not Christian, it is pagan. The Christian serves, he lowers himself. Let us be sure that our brothers and sisters do not ever feel alone! The second consequence: if God, through Jesus, involved himself with man to the point of becoming one of us, it means that whatever we have done to a brother or a sister we have done to him. Jesus himself reminded us of this: whoever has fed, welcomed, visited, loved one of the least and poorest of men, will have done it to the Son of God.
- The Church today must sing a new song of service
 - (WYD, July 28) The final word: serve. The opening words of the psalm that we proclaimed are: “Sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 95:1). What is this new song? It does not consist of words, it is not a melody, it is the song of your life, it is allowing our life to be identified with that of Jesus, it is sharing his sentiments, his thoughts, his actions. And the life of Jesus is a life for others. The life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service. In our Second Reading today, Saint Paul says: “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor 9:19). In order to proclaim Jesus, Paul made himself “a slave to all”. Evangelizing means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did.
- The Church is a communion of charity
 - (November 6, 2013 Catechesis) And we come to the third aspect of communion in holy things, that is, communion in charity, the unity among us that creates charity, love. The gentiles, observing the early Christians, said: how they love each other, how they wish one another well! They do not hate, they do not speak against one another. This is the charity, the love of God that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts. The charisms are important in the life of the Christian community, but they are always a means for growth in charity, in love, which St Paul sets above the charisms (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13). Without love, in fact, even the most extraordinary gifts are in vain; this man heals people, he has that power, this other virtue... but does he have love and charity in his heart? If he does then all is well, but if he does not he is no servant of the Church. Without love no gift or charism could serve the Church, for where there is not love there is an emptiness that becomes filled with selfishness. And I ask myself: if we all were egotistical, could we live in communion and peace? No, it's not possible, that is why it is necessary that love unite us. Our smallest gesture of love benefits everyone!

Therefore, to live out unity in the Church and communion in charity means not seeking one's own interests but sharing the suffering and the joy of one's brothers (cf. 1 Cor 12:26), ready to carry the weight of the poorest and the weakest. This fraternal solidarity is not a figure of speech, a saying, but an integral part of the communion among Christians. If we live it, we are a sign to the world, the "sacrament" of God's love. This is what we are one for another and what we are for all! It is not just petty love that we can offer one another, but something much more profound: it is a communion that renders us capable of entering into the joy and sorrow of others and making them sincerely our own. Often we are too dry, indifferent and detached and rather than transmitting brotherhood, we communicate bad temper, coldness and selfishness. And with bad temper, coldness and selfishness the Church cannot grow; the Church grows only by the love that comes from the Holy Spirit. The Lord invites us to open ourselves to communion with him, in the Sacraments, in the charisms and in charity, in order to live out our Christian vocation with dignity!

- (B16 in Deus Caritas Est) As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. (It led to the institutionalization of charity, because individual charity was not enough).
- We must wake up the world with our charity
 - (Nov 29 meeting with Major Superiors of Religious Men) The witness that can really attract is that associated with attitudes which are uncommon: generosity, detachment, sacrifice, self-forgetfulness in order to care for others. This is the witness, the "martyrdom" of religious life. It "sounds an alarm" for people. Religious say to people with their life: What's happening?" These people are telling me something! ... The Church," therefore, "must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world.
- For us, Mary is a great model of charity and shows us how to do it with faith.
 - (October 23, 2013 Catechesis) We come to the second aspect: Mary as the model of charity. In what way is Mary a living example of love for the Church? Let us think the readiness she showed toward her cousin Elizabeth. In visiting her, the Virgin Mary brought not only material help — she brought this too — but she also brought Jesus, who was already alive in her womb. Bringing Jesus into that house meant bringing joy, the fullness of joy. Elizabeth and Zechariah were rejoicing at a pregnancy that had seemed impossible at their age, but it was the young Mary who brought them the fullness of joy, the joy that comes from Jesus and from the Holy Spirit, and is expressed by gratuitous charity, by sharing with, helping, and understanding others. Our Lady also wants to bring the great gift of Jesus to us, to us all; and with him she brings us his love, his peace, and his joy. In this, the Church is like Mary: the Church is not a shop, she is not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO. The Church is sent to bring Christ and his Gospel to all. She does not bring herself — whether small or great, strong or weak, the Church carries Jesus and should be like Mary when she went to visit Elizabeth. What did Mary take to her? Jesus. The Church brings Jesus: this is the center of the Church, to carry Jesus! If, as a hypothesis, the Church were not to bring Jesus, she would be a dead Church. The Church must bring Jesus, the love of Jesus, the charity of Jesus.
- I'd like to finish with his thoughts in Evangelii Gaudium about our charity specifically to the poor, which provides a great summary of Pope Francis' thoughts and deeds and gives us all a great call to action.
 - (186) Care for poor is based on faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast.
 - In union with God, we hear a plea
 - (187) Each individual Christian and every community is called by God to liberate and promote the poor and help them become full part of society. Docile and attentive to cry of the poor and come to their aid. Bible shows that God hears the cry of the poor and acts. To ignore the poor is to oppose Father's plan. God's love doesn't abide in one who refuses to help his brother (1 John 3:17).

- (188) Care for the poor is not the mission of a few. Jesus wants us to give the crowds something to eat, to eliminate structural causes of poverty and meet real needs. Solidarity refers to more than sporadic acts of generosity, but is a mindset that thinks in terms of community.
 - (190) Need to hear the cry of entire peoples. “Human rights” can sometimes be used inordinately to defend rights of richer peoples. Planet belongs to and is meant for all mankind. Even if people are born with fewer places or less development it’s no justification for living with less dignity. More fortunate should “renounce some of their rights” to place goods at service of others. Need to hear pleas beyond our borders, to help people become “artisans of their destiny.”
 - (191) Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor. We should be scandalized that people starve when there’s plenty of food that is wasted. (192) But we want more than “dignified sustenance” but their welfare, education, health care and above all dignified employment with a just wage.
 - Fidelity to the Gospel, lest we run in vain
 - (193) We hear the cry of the poor when we are moved by their suffering. We need to show mercy to receive it. Fathers of the Church gave counter-cultural resistance to self-centered hedonism of paganism.
 - (194) “This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it.” We need to accept exhortations with courage and zeal, without complicating “something so simple” or clouding “something so clear.” We should be concerned with remaining faithful to this call and not just with maintaining doctrinal fidelity.
 - (195) St. Paul’s criterion of authenticity was not forgetting the poor (Gal 2), succumbing to self-centered pagan lifestyle. We may not always reflect full beauty of Gospel, but we should never lack care for the least whom society discards. (196) Sometimes our minds and hearts are hardened, forgetful, distracted, alienated, making gift of self and solidarity more difficult.
 - The special place of the poor in God’s people
 - (197) God became poor (2 Cor 8:9). Mary was poor. Jesus was born in a manger, redeemed with two turtle doves, raised in home of work, preached “good news to the poor,” blessed the poor and identified with their hunger, thirst, nakedness, illnesses, migrancy and imprisonment.
 - (198) Option for the poor is primarily theological more than cultural, sociological, political or philosophical. God shows the poor “his first mercy.” We’re called to have the mind of Christ, and give primacy of charity toward poor. Christ enriches us with his poverty. “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us.” The poor know suffering of Christ. New evangelization acknowledges saving power at work in them and places them at the center of the Church’s pilgrimage path. Called to find Christ in them, assist their causes, be their friends, listen to them, speak for them, and embrace the wisdom God wants to give us through them.
 - (199) Commitment more than promotional or assistant programs, but loving attentiveness seeing them as one with us, contemplating and appreciating their goodness, experience, culture, faith. Serve not out of vanity or necessity but love of their beauty. Option for the poor not an ideology exploiting poor for personal or political gain. Making poor feel at home is “greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the kingdom” Without preferential option for poor, the charity of sharing the Gospel can be misunderstood as just words.
 - (200) The worst discrimination against the poor is lack of spiritual care. Our preferential option for the poor must translate into preferential religious care.
 - (201) Many excuse lack of closeness to poor by other duties. None of us is exempt from concern for the poor and social justice. Francis hopes his words lead to more than “commentary or discussion with no practical effect.”

- Conclusion
 - Story of journalist in India and the blind man with oranges.
 - Let's not let Pope Francis' words just be the subject of a retreat conference. Let's act on them, doing in our own situation what he's doing in us. He gets that his life is a mission, the continuation of the mission of Christ's self-giving love. May we all recognize that as Christians we're all called to be missionaries of charity!