



Faith Matters

Simple reflections on our faith

by Marilyn Bergeron

Pope Leo XIV: The World's Shepherd

The world watched as Pope Leo XIV was elected the new leader of the Catholic Church.

We've heard about his American upbringing, his missionary work in Peru, his connection to Pope Francis, and much more. Why is there a Pope? What are his responsibilities?

The structure of Catholicism comes from the Bible.

Keys to the Kingdom

Jesus gave the Apostle Peter, the "keys to the Kingdom" saying "upon this rock I will build my Church". Peter was the first Pope. Jesus portrays the Church as a spiritual temple. We are the body of Christ and He is the permanent head, working through the Pope.

The Church has approximately 1.4 billion baptized Catholics representing over 17% of the global population. We come from every country, race, culture and language. Diversity is wonderful but very challenging to lead. The needs vary dramatically. In some places, faith in God is growing rapidly, in others it's

dropping quickly. In some places the faith is respected and in others, forbidden.

As head of Vatican City State, the Pope is a significant religious, political and global figure.

Since Pope Leo has just taken on the position, let's look at what a typical week for Pope Francis looked like, according to reports.

A Typical Day for the Pope

Pope Francis rose early around 4:30 am, prayed privately for a couple of hours. He celebrated Mass, then shared breakfast at 8 am with a few guests.

Some days there would be many meetings and conferences. Other days, he might spend some time in his office, reading and keeping abreast of world news. Often there would be gatherings in the Apostolic Palace to address formal audiences with dignitaries and groups of the faithful. His Papal Audiences were public gatherings to share his thoughts on religious and humanitarian issues. Occasionally, he met with the College of Cardinals who helped him make decisions.

He might have had a meeting with some of the 5,000 Bishops in the world. They came in groups for a special audience every 5 years called the Ad Limina Visits to report on the state of their Dioceses.

He blessed the crowds in St. Peter's square every Wednesday that he was in Rome. He was driven around the Square in an open vehicle where huge crowds of people have waited for hours to receive his blessing. Sundays at noon, he blessed the crowds from his window.

Sometimes he would slip out of his residence in the evening to meet and mingle with people in different churches in Rome – remember that he is also the Bishop of Rome.

He ate supper at 8 PM, went to his room to read and pray. Lights out at 10.

International Visits

During his reign as Pontiff, Pope Francis visited 68 countries during 47 Apostolic Journeys. Those visits ranged from formal meetings to massive outdoor World Youth Days.

In 2022, Pope Francis visited Canada, with stops in Alberta, Quebec and the territory of Nunavut. On every visit, his time would have been planned to the minute to include as many different groups and events as possible. Exhausting! He was 85 years of age at this time.

Obviously, he didn't work alone. He had staff and advisors to help him and to arrange for these visits. But he would have carried the weight.

"CEO" of the Universal Church

The Pope has full and supreme power over the universal church in matters of:

- faith
- morals
- church discipline and
- government.

This includes overseeing Church teachings, addressing theological disputes, and appointing Bishops worldwide.

It worried some people that the decisions the Pope made would lead to significant changes that affected their beliefs or wishes. The Pope cannot change established teachings of the Church on faith and morals because he doesn't create or change truth, rather he is the custodian.

However, the Pope, after due deliberations with the College of Cardinals, can make a pronouncement on issues of faith or morals by interpreting them to address emerging situations in the world. Such a pronouncement made from the Seat of St. Peter (ex-cathedra) is considered infallible or a dogma. The conditions for this papal infallibility are very limited. It has only happened a handful of times in history.

In many ways, the Pope resembles a CEO, the leader of a multifaceted "business", who makes decisions with his staff, counts on them to detail plans and focuses on the topics most important to him.

A New Pontificat

Pope Leo XIV will likely have a similarly packed schedule. The priorities may change as the world around us changes. The responsibility must be almost overwhelming.

Our Pope needs time in prayer to think, to connect with God and receive strength and direction from Him. We, as Catholic Christians, have a huge responsibility in turn, to pray for the Pope and all the Church leaders who surround him. May God Bless the Pope!