



## "The Pope is Like Us"

Letizia Airos (September 25, 2015)



Receiving Pope Francis' message of simplicity among everyday people

Who am I to write about Pope Francis?! I kept on asking myself this question, until yesterday. I was typing, but an internal voice was blocking me. I would think... what can I add to the rivers of words and reports already written about his Us visit?

These have

been days dominated by the Pontiff 's presence. The first Pope in history to talk before the Congress in Washington, prior to going to New York, the United Nations and Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families Conference. Francis' words, his actions, even some of his simplest

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gestures, have this time reached places maybe never touched before.

His words will no doubt resound inside the palaces of the powerful, have a bearing on the US electoral campaign and influence the United Nations future decisions.

Let's hope that those who have the ability, the responsibility and the opportunity, will be brave enough to follow the Pope's suggestions.

His voice, incredibly firm behind its genuine gentleness, stirred inconvenient truths, some even unpronounceable for many. His words of inclusions often catch you off guard and their echo is long lasting.

And all this with the simplicity of the truth, always virtually holding hands with the poor and the needy. People like himself. "We were once foreigners" he says.

So what can I add about Pope Francis...

Yesterday afternoon I've somehow met him, close up. Even before seeing him in person. I have met him among the people, after having waited for him in the crowd for hours. Choosing to be one of the many and not the journalist with a press pass.

So it happens that in a beautiful September afternoon I listened to hope, I allowed myself to be infected by the smiles, I endured the body odor of those who had sneaked out of work early to see the Pope, I heard the screams of the children, their annoyed cries, I elicited the smile of the security staff, I shared water, I tried to sing along in Spanish... not prayers, but melodies of celebration.

This was happening in New York, not far from the opulent shop windows of the 5th Avenue. Being among people has meant feeling the Pope's presence even before seeing him. The simplicity of the Pope's message, 'a son of immigrants', was being shared through the stories, the looks, the body language of the people around me. Entire families. Youth dressed in the oddest fashion. Many of them proudly South American. But many more were the nationalities represented on the 5th Avenue. Women, men and children that together waited, standing for hours, to see him only for thirty seconds, passing by, and then go home, happy.

The last few hours have made me aware of what really is that strikes you about Pope Francis and captivates everybody: the simplicity of his message that is directed to all, a message always delivered with the same direct and comprehensible language.

Because there is something that we can all understand and that is the starting point of everything we can say: love. That love that inspires you to look after one another, love for the planet, love that is above any religious faith .

A feeling that could be the answer to all those problems that Pope Francis, with courage not free from provocation, is addressing in front of the most powerful world leaders. And why not, even in front of the Church itself, a super powerful institution.

There were so many people on the streets, and that made you somehow feel very small. But the desire to identify yourself in Francis' message, more a man like you than a Pontiff, and the hope to meet his gaze even if for a few seconds, seemed to convey strength and somehow greatness.

Many would have seen him only for a split second, many others not even that. But the wait created a sense of closeness that I wouldn't have imagined.

Again, who am I to write about Pope Francis? Not sure, but I tried to feel on my skin the mystery of that red thread that connects his existence with the humanity that has faith in him.

Because the Pope is like us, said a guy hiding under a big hat that he quickly removed as he saw the papa-mobile approaching.



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