

REFLECTIONS FROM ROME

The Five P's of Similarity between Pope and Saint Francis

by Tom Bello, OFS National Minister



All of us have been blessed as Secular Franciscans with a strong “talking point” with those interested in following our vocation: For the first time in the human history of the Church, we have a Holy Father who has specifically chosen the name Francis in his identification with St. Francis.

On Wednesday, November 12, 2014, following the International Election Chapter in Assisi, our National Secretary Jan Parker, our National Councilor Mary Frances Charsky and I received printed invitations for a General Audience with Pope Francis in the same St. Peter's Square you see above.

It occurred to me then, and I share with you now, that I have found many Catholics more interested in sharing their excitement about Pope Francis than in learning more about St. Francis or our Secular Franciscan charism. Thus, permit me to share with you so that you might share with others the Five P's of similarity between Pope and Saint Francis, which Pope Francis himself has shared in his words and example.

1. Putting on Christ. In his visit to Assisi on October 4, 2013, Pope Francis spoke about St. Francis: “His first and most essential witness is this: that being a Christian means having a living relationship with the person of Jesus; it means putting on Christ,

being conformed to him.” Lives putting on Christ characterize both Pope and St. Francis.

2. Peace. Again, in Assisi, Pope Francis said, “This is the second witness that Francis gives us: that everyone who follows Christ receives true peace, the peace that Christ alone can give. . . . Many people, when they think of Saint Francis, think of peace. . . . What is the peace which Francis received, experienced and lived, and which he passes on to us? It is the peace of Christ, which is born of the greatest love of all, the love of the cross.” Being “Instruments of God's Peace” characterizes both Pope and St. Francis.

3. Protection of all God's Creation. Again, in Assisi, Pope Francis said, Saint Francis “bears witness to the need to respect all that God has created, and that men and women are called to safeguard and protect, but above all he bears witness to respect and love for every human being.” Protection of all that God has created characterizes both Pope and St. Francis.

4. Poverty. During the Papal election, a good friend whispered, “Don't forget the poor!” Three days after his election, Pope Francis retold those words and related, “And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi.” As St. Francis espoused Lady Poverty, so Pope Francis went on to say, “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!”

5. Prayer. As St. Francis spent days in prayer, so Pope Francis admits to constant prayer. He said, “I pray the breviary every morning. I like to pray with the psalms. Then, later, I celebrate Mass. I pray the Rosary. . . . In the evening then, between seven and eight o'clock, I stay in front of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour in adoration. But I pray mentally even when I am waiting at the dentist or at other times of the day.” Both Pope and St. Francis can be characterized as people of deep and constant prayer.

Let us pray. God, help us to share our Secular Franciscan vocation at this unique time when our Holy Father himself has both chosen the name of St. Francis and, more importantly, chosen to follow the footsteps of St. Francis closer to Christ. May we do the same in our words and actions. We pray in Jesus' name.