

"A MISSION OF LOVE"

The man in the little black Fiat

September 2015 will certainly be remembered as the month when Pope Francis came to our country for his first apostolic visit to the United States and to the United Nations. As the 265th successor of Peter, this 78 year old man, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, born in Argentina of Italian immigrant parents, and a member of the Jesuit order, was received by the government, the press and the public with rock star popularity. His humility, gentleness, and sincerity were universally admired by all. American Catholics embraced their Holy Father, Supreme Pontiff, Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Christ on earth with unparalleled respect and esteem.

During the course of his visit, he delivered a total of nineteen addresses (13 speeches and 6 homilies) in Washington, DC; New York City; and Philadelphia. These scheduled messages comprised 69 pages and over 28,000 words; not counting his frequent "off script" remarks. The theme of his visit was "Love is Our Mission"; indeed the word "love" appears a total of 65 times in his addresses. Perhaps the best summarization of this theme is his quote, "To testify to the immensity of God's love is the heart of the mission entrusted to the Successor of Peter, the Vicar of the One who on the cross embraced the whole of mankind."

As a parish now with a dozen years of experience with the stewardship way of life, we understand that reciprocating God's love for us is best made manifest by our love for all creation. We strive to express that love with action - the sharing of our time, talent and treasure. Our intentions are "SMART"; that is, they are Simple, Meaningful, Actionable, Relative and Timely.

Our stewardship program has focused on interpersonal relationships demonstrating love for one another; that is, the sharing our God-given gifts of time, talent and treasure with others to help build the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis reminds us that this centrality of stewardship is to be extended to our love and respect for the environment. In his recent encyclical "*Laudato Si*" ("On Care for Our Common Home"), he states that our "dominion" over the universe should be understood in the sense of responsible stewardship. We should not pass on to future generations an environment that we have damaged with respect to the quality of the environment that we received.

The Holy Father ended his visit with these remarks. "I pray that you all may be good and generous stewards of the human and material resources entrusted to you. ... I will pray for you and your families, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. May God bless you all. God bless America!"

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