

My Brothers and Sisters,

We have a new Pope. On Wednesday the Cardinals elected Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Jesuit Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, as our Holy Father. He is the first Jesuit pope and the first pope from the Americas.

Cardinal Bergoglio chose the name Francis. Catholic blogger Rocco Palmo offered an astute analysis of his choice:

By choosing the name of the founder of his community's traditional rivals, the 266th Roman pontiff – the first from the American continent, home to more than half of the 1.2 billion-member church – has signaled three things: his desire to be a force of unity in a polarized fold, a heart for the poor, and his intent to "repair God's house, which has fallen into ruin"... that is, *to rebuild the church*.<sup>1</sup>

I think most of us are familiar with the reference to “rebuild the church.” One day, while praying before a crucifix in the dilapidated church of San Damiano, St. Francis heard a voice saying: "Go, Francis, and repair my house, which as you see is falling into ruin." He took this literally and refinished the church and later refinished some other churches and chapels before realizing that God wanted him to rebuild the Church (with a capital C). It would seem that our Holy Father, by choosing the name Francis, is inviting all of us to be part of rebuilding the Church of Jesus Christ.

In last Sunday's Gospel, through the parable of the prodigal father, Jesus proclaimed God's mercy and forgiveness. In today's Gospel, he shared God's mercy and forgiveness with the woman caught in the very act of committing adultery.

To those who wanted to stone her, Jesus said, “*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*’ .... *And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.*” In effect, Jesus reminded them that they were one with the woman in needing God's mercy and forgiveness. They might not have committed adultery, but they all had sinned. The elders left first, presumably because they had a longer lifetime of sin for which they needed forgiveness.

This reminds us that all of us also need God's mercy and forgiveness. We not only are united as sons and daughters of God but also are united in needing God's forgiveness and mercy. The corollary of this is that none of us should be judging anyone else.

Jesus then asked the woman if anyone had condemned her. When she said no one, he replied, “*Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more.*” Although Jesus was telling her not to sin any more, some would argue that, more importantly, Jesus was empowering her not to sin again. As Catholics, we believe that God not only forgives our sins in the sense of wiping the slate clean but also empowers us to live better, more Christian lives. However, none of us will ever attain perfect maturity or perfection. Therefore, sin will always be part of our lives, and we will always need conversion, i.e., to turn away from sin and selfishness.

My brothers and sisters, during Lent, we enter into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising so that we may die to sin and rise to new life with Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Rocco Palmo, “De Argentina a Roma – Bergoglio Elected Pope Francis I,” *Whispers in the Loggia*, 13 March 2013, Posted at 15:14, <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/>.