

## The Missionary Transformation of the Church and the Priesthood: Ten Challenges of Pope Francis

- Introduction
  - 20 months ago, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected the 265<sup>th</sup> successor of St. Peter. He was elected, as many cardinals publicly noted and he himself described three days later in a get-together with journalists, as a reformer, joking that many suggested he take the name Hadrian VII in allusion to 16<sup>th</sup> century Hadrian VI who had tried to reform the Church after the scandals that had led to the Protestant Reformation. But the reform he has been carrying out has been much more extensive than the one people predicted, because the corruption he's been trying to address is far broader than banks, or butlers, or bumbling bureaucracies.
  - His choice to name himself after St. Francis of Assisi is highly significant, pointing not only to his concern for the poor but also alluding to the type of renewal he's seeking to bring about. When Jesus Christ spoke to young Giovanni "Francesco" Bernardone from the Crucifix in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano on the incline of Assisi asking him, "Rebuild my Church which you can see is falling into ruins," he was asking far more than repairing San Damiano. He was going to use him to rebuild Christ's Church as a whole, which is not made out of marble, wood, bricks and glass, but men, women, boys and girls, "living stones" St. Peter calls them, in a "spiritual edifice" built on Christ the capstone. The reform that Pope Francis has begun is one that is supposed to reach every living stone in the Church.
  - To reform means literally to "re-shape" and over the last 20 months Pope Francis has been seeking to form the entire people of God to be more aligned to the Gospel. He's had a particular emphasis on the reform of the clergy. What I'd like to do today is briefly to cover ten of the more significant reforms he's been talking about that are meant to impact not just the Church universal, but our priestly life and work, our parishes, and the lives of the faithful entrusted to us.
- The first challenge is to get out of our comfort zones to bring the Gospel to the peripheries
  - In his March 7 intervention in the General Congregation of Cardinals intervention that changed the dynamics of conclave and ultimately Church and world history, Cardinal Bergoglio told his brother cardinals that the Church exists and is impelled by Jesus to evangelize, to come out of herself and go to the ends of the earth — not just geographically but also to those at the "periphery of existence," who are alienated from God and others through sin, pain, injustice, ignorance, ideology, material and spiritual poverty, and other types of misery. When those in the Church lose this "apostolic zeal," when the Church doesn't come out of herself to bring Christ to others, she becomes self-referential and sick. "The evils that over the course of time happen in ecclesial institutions," he said, "have their root in a self-reference and a sort of theological narcissism. ... The self-referent Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him come out."
  - He said that the next pope had to be a "man who, from the contemplation and adoration of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to go out of herself to the existential peripheries, who helps her to be a fruitful mother living off the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing," a job description that his brother cardinals evidently thought that he met.
  - In his apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" released last November that contained the program for his pontificate, Pope Francis expressed his hopes for the missionary metamorphosis of the Church that he's been seeking to catalyze. "I dream of a ...missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures, can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."
  - He's called all Catholics institutions, all priests and all Catholics to this transformation and that's certainly a challenge. That involves first service to those who are neglected. He said in his inaugural

homily as Pope that we in the Church must open our arms to “embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison” (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in short “those in need, who are often the last we think about.”

- But it also involves sharing the Gospel with others. (EG 200) The worst discrimination against the poor is lack of spiritual care. Our preferential option for the poor must translate into preferential religious care.
- These “outskirts” also involve those who are close. He said in Assisi last October, “The outskirts ... are places ... [where] primarily people living in particular situations in life. ... The outskirts that hurt me a great deal was to find children in middle class families who didn't know how to make the Sign of the Cross. But you see, this is an outskirts! .... These are true outskirts of existence where God is absent.”
- He has particularly called for the reform of the parish. He wrote in EG 28: “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution that evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”
- This sharing of the Gospel is supposed to be a passion of everyone who knows and loves Jesus and others. EG: “What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?” We’re convinced from “personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. ... We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize.”
- Speaking about the first reform needed, he said in *El Jesuita*: “I believe that a Church that reduces itself to administration, to guarding the small flock, is a Church that in the long run is sick. The pastor who closes himself in is not an authentic pastor of the sheep, but a sheep dresser who makes curls with their hair instead of looking for others.”
- To be a good shepherd means to go out in search of the lost sheep. Last June 17, he told members of the Church of Rome, “There is a beautiful passage of the Gospel which tells us about the shepherd who, when he returned to the sheepfold realized that one sheep was missing. He left the 99 others and went in search of it, he went off to look for one. But brothers and sisters, we have one sheep. We have lost the other 99! We must go out, we must go out to them! In this culture — let us tell the truth — we only have one, we are a minority! And do we feel the fervor, the apostolic zeal to go out and find the other 99? This is an enormous responsibility and we must ask the Lord for the grace of generosity, and the courage and patience to go out, to go out and preach the Gospel. Ah, this is difficult. It is easier to stay at home, with that one sheep! It is easier with that sheep to comb its fleece, to stroke it... but we priests and you Christians too, everyone: the Lord wants us to be shepherds, he does not want us to fuss with combing fleeces! Shepherds! And when a community is withdrawn, always among the same people who speak, this community is not a life-giving community. It is barren; it is not fertile. The fecundity of the Gospel comes through the grace of Jesus Christ, but through us, our preaching, our courage, our patience.”
- The first challenge is for us in the Church to go from maintenance to mission.

- The second challenge is for us first to proclaim the “kerygma” rather than make it seem like the Church’s teaching is a “disjointed multitude of doctrines.”
  - Kerygma is the term to describe the essential proclamation of the Good News, as Pope Francis himself would write “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” (EG 164)
  - This is not always, practically, what the Church announces or what people hear. We’re supposed to be inviting people into the “great stream of joy” flowing from Jesus’ “brimming heart” but instead many Christians talk about the faith and experience it as if it were a “Lent without Easter,” and they look like “someone who has just come back from a funeral.”
  - EG 34: “In today’s world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way certain issues that are part of the Church’s moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects, which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message. We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.”
  - In a 2010 interview he says that proclaiming the Kerygma, “provokes astonishment, and brings one to contemplation and to faith. ... After the encounter with Jesus comes reflection, ... where one can deduce the principles of religious and moral behavior.” He expressed his concern that sometimes there can be a “degrading reductionism” in the preaching of the Church, focusing above all on sexual morality and what’s licit and illicit. “When this happens,” he stated, “we bury the treasure of the living Jesus, the treasure of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the treasure of the project of Christian life that has many other aspects beyond sexual questions. We push to the side a rich catechesis, with the mysteries of faith and the Creed, and we center ourselves on whether we should organize a rally against a political proposal to legalize condoms.”
  - This means not that we never talk about controversial issues, but that a fitting proportion must be kept in frequency of subject matter. We must speak about justice and charity more than temperance, grace more than law, Christ more than the Church, God’s word more than the Pope (EG 38).
  - (EG 168) In moral catechesis, he said we should show the attractiveness of a life of wisdom, self-fulfillment and enrichment, which can help people better understand the rejection of evil that endanger life. We should be joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of goodness and beauty of a life of fidelity rather than experts in dire predictions and dour judges.
  - So the second challenge is to make sure we both live the faith as Good News, that we experience the joy that comes from Jesus’ constant accompaniment, from his heroic gift of saving our life, and that we announce that first and foremost to others. His papal primer on preaching contained in *Evangelium Gaudium*, the longest such focus on preaching in the history of the papacy, is an attempt to help in this effort of evangelization by a reexamination of the purpose of preaching, the message, the messenger and the style.
- The third challenge is to overcome the cancer of clericalism in the Church, which is cancer that affects not just priests.
  - Clericalization means focusing fundamentally on the things of the clergy and, more specifically, the sanctuary, rather than bringing the Gospel to the world.
  - In a 2011 interview with an Argentine Catholic news agency, he said this contagious spiritual sickness comes from a clericalism that passes from clergy to lay people. “We priests tend to clericalize the laity. We do not realize it, but it is as if we infect them with our own disease. And the laity — not all, but many — ask us on their knees to clericalize them, because it is more comfortable to be an altar server than the protagonist of a lay path. We cannot fall into that trap — it is a sinful complicity.”
  - He repeated these thoughts in a July 27 speech to CELAM in Brazil: There is a “sinful complicity: the priest clericalizes the lay person and the lay person kindly asks to be clericalized, because deep down it is easier.
  - Clericalism ails the clergy when we become too self-referential rather than missionary. But it afflicts

lay people worse, when they begin to believe that the fundamental service God is asking of them is to become greeters, lectors, or extraordinary ministers at Church rather than to live and spread the faith in their families, workplaces, schools neighborhoods and beyond.

- The reform that's needed, he continued in that interview, is "neither to clericalize nor ask to be clericalized. The lay person is a lay person and has to live as a lay person with the power of baptism, which enables him to be a leaven of the love of God in society itself, to create and sow hope, to proclaim the faith, not from a pulpit but from his everyday life. And like all of us, the lay person is called to carry his daily cross — the cross of the lay person, not of the priest."
- One of the wild grapes that flows from the vine of clericalism, the future Pope said in *El Jesuita*, is a hypercritical spirit that leads some Catholic priests and faithful to expend most of their energy censuring others inside and outside the Church rather than seeking to live and share the joy of the Christian faith.
- "This is a problem not only for priests," he said, "but also for lay people. One isn't a good Catholic when he is looking only for the negative, for what separates us. This isn't what Jesus wants." Such unredeemed behavior — found regularly in personal conversations, blogs, comment boxes and internet video analyses — "mutilates the message" of the Christian faith and scares people away from it, he said. Placing those with whom one disagrees in a vitriolic vortex is not the path of the reform of the laity and the Church.
- Instead lay people and priests both must become missionary disciples in communion: converted followers of Jesus, who together with others who share Jesus' life, faithfully seek to spread their joy, life and love to those who have not yet come into that two-fold communion. It's a community of believers trained and inspired to go out to transform politics, society, education, neighborhoods, family, and marriages. It's a brotherhood of Good Samaritans drawing near to neighbors with love and mercy. It's faithful who are salt of the earth and not just salty critics of the Church. It's a body of torchbearers radiating Christ's light rather than hiding it within the bushel basket of self-referential, spiritually worldly and ultimately "sick" parochial or diocesan structures.
- The fourth challenge is to make a mess, to take some risks, to get dirty
  - In his Sept 19 interview with Jesuit publications, he said, "Religious men and women are prophets. ...A religious must never give up prophecy." As a Jesuit he takes this prophetic dimension seriously and then gives it greater definition. "Being prophets may sometimes imply making waves. I do not know how to put it... Prophecy makes noise, uproar, some say 'a mess.'"
  - When he spoke to Argentinian youth in Rio on July 25, he said, "Let me tell you what I hope will be the outcome of World Youth Day: I hope there will be a noise [a mess, *hacer lìo*]. Here there will be noise, I'm quite sure. Here in Rio there will be plenty of noise, no doubt about that. But I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves. ... May the bishops and priests forgive me if some of you create a bit of confusion afterwards. That's my advice. Thanks for whatever you can do."
  - There's obviously a risk in making a mess and encouraging others to make a mess. But Pope Francis says that it's a risk worth taking. To the members of new movements on the Vigil of Pentecost, May 18, he said: "But what happens if we step outside ourselves? The same as can happen to anyone who comes out of the house and onto the street: an accident. But I tell you, I far prefer a Church that has had a few accidents to a Church that has fallen sick from being closed."
  - (EG 49) "I prefer a Church that is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."
  - He stressed in a Sept 27 Year of Faith celebration: If a Christian goes to the streets, or to the outskirts, he or she may risk the same thing that can happen to anyone out there: an accident. How often have we seen accidents on the road! But I am telling you: I would prefer a thousand times over a bruised Church than an ill Church!"
  - Part of this challenge is to enter into people's night, entering into dialogue with people wandering away from God and his search because of confusion.
    - WYD address to Bishops. The Church follows Jesus' work on the Road to Emmaus.



good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin.”

- On July 7 in Lampedusa, where 20,000 people have perished over the last 25 years trying to flee persecution and poverty in northern Africa: “Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: “poor soul...!”, and then go on our way. It’s not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business.”
- Like Jonah (Oct 7 homily), we can flee from crossing the road to care for people like he fled from helping the people of Nineveh. “Jonah had a plan for his life: he wanted to write his own history well, according to God’s ways. But he was the one writing it, the same with the priest, the same with the Levite” ... I ask myself “and I also ask you: do we allow God to write the history of our lives or do we want to write it? This speaks to us of docility: are we docile to the Word of God?”
- Syria Vigil (Sept 7): “God’s world is a world where everyone feels responsible for the other, for the good of the other. ... Is this really the world that I desire? Is this really the world that we all carry in our hearts? ... Is this the world in which we are living? ... When man thinks only of himself, of his own interests and places himself in the center, when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God’s place, then all relationships are broken and everything is ruined; then the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict. ... It would be good for us to ask ourselves as well: Am I really my brother’s keeper? Yes, you are your brother’s keeper! To be human means to care for one another! But when harmony is broken, a metamorphosis occurs: the brother who is to be cared for and loved becomes an adversary to fight, to kill.”
- He said to the bishops assembled in Rio on July 27: “We need a Church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy. Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of “wounded” persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love.”
- He said to religious last November that the Church must “sound an alarm” and “wake up the world” with our charity. The Church needs to lead the reform of the world from globalized indifference to globalized solidarity and charity. And we priests have a particular role in facilitating that reform and sounding that alarm clock.
- The seventh challenge is to confront our spiritual worldliness
  - When he gave his pre-conclave intervention to his brother Cardinals, he cited the great Jesuit theologian Henri De Lubac who talked about the cancer of a worldly spirit instead of the Spirit of God. “When the Church is self-referent without realizing it,” Cardinal Bergoglio state, “she believes she has her own light. She ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* [the mystery of the moon reflecting the light of the sun (God)] and gives way to that very great evil which is spiritual worldliness (which according to [the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Cardinal Henri] De Lubac, is the worst evil that can come upon the Church). The self-referent Church lives to give glory only to one another.” The fundamental corruption is spiritual worldliness, “living within herself, of herself and for herself.”
  - He mentioned these thoughts anew at the Pentecost Vigil on May 18— “However there is one problem that can afflict Christians: the spirit of the world, the worldly spirit, spiritual worldliness. This leads to self-sufficiency, to living by the spirit of the world rather than by the spirit of Jesus.”
  - Spiritual worldliness is when we place our faith, hope and love in mammon, in the things of this world, rather than in God.
  - He told the Bishops of CELAM on July 28 in Rio: “The Church is an institution, but when she makes herself a “center”, she becomes merely functional, and slowly but surely turns into a kind of NGO. The Church then claims to have a light of her own, and she stops being that *mysterium lunae* [mystery of the moon reflecting the light of the sun, representing Christ] of which the Church

Fathers spoke. She becomes increasingly self-referential and loses her need to be missionary. From an “institution” she becomes a “enterprise”. She stops being a bride and ends up being an administrator; from being a servant, she becomes an “inspector”.

- EG 93: “Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being. ... It is a subtle way of seeking one’s “own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21). It takes on many forms. ... Since it is based on carefully cultivated appearances, it is not always linked to outward sin; from without, everything appears as it should be. But if it were to seep into the Church, ‘it would be infinitely more disastrous than any other worldliness which is simply moral.’
- EG 94: “This worldliness can be fuelled in two deeply interrelated ways. One is the attraction of gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the **self-absorbed prometean neopelagianism** of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others. These are manifestations of an anthropocentric immanentism. It is impossible to think that a genuine evangelizing thrust could emerge from these adulterated forms of Christianity.
- EG 95: “This insidious worldliness is evident in a number of attitudes that appear opposed, yet all have the same pretense of “taking over the space of the Church”. In some people we see an ostentatious **preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time.** In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few. In others, this spiritual worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social and political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs, or an obsession with programs of self-help and self-realization. It can also translate into a concern to be seen, into a social life full of appearances, meetings, dinners and receptions. It can also lead to a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations whose principal beneficiary is not God’s people but the Church as an institution. The mark of Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, is not present; closed and elite groups are formed, and no effort is made to go forth and seek out those who are distant or the immense multitudes who thirst for Christ. Evangelical fervor is replaced by the empty pleasure of complacency and self-indulgence.
- This is a particular challenge for us in the highly organized, institutionally wealthy parishes and Churches of the West. We priests have got to en flesh the first beatitude, to live with spiritual poverty treasuring the kingdom, in such a way that we can help people more easily to make the same evangelical choices. Pope Francis is begging “for a poor church for the poor,” which he said was the reason why he took the name Francis.
- The eighth challenge is to overcome the “ferocious idolatry of money,” which leads to a “culture of waste” in which people are discarded.
  - EG 55: “One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the **ancient golden calf** (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the **idolatry of money** and the **dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose.** The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption.”
  - In his July 27 television interview with the Brazilian network *O Globo* he said: “The world in which we’re living has fallen into a ferocious idolatry of money. There is a world wide policy dominated by the pursuit of money. **What’s in control now is money.** These means that there is a world wide

economy policy without any ethical control whatever, a self-sufficient economic system that is arranging social groups in accordance with this idolatry. What is happening as a result? When this world of the ferocious idolatry of money reigns, everything focuses for the most part in the center. Those on the extremes of society [the young who don't work yet, seniors who are too old to work, and the handicapped who can't work] are badly taken care of, neglected and discarded."

- Several times he's returned to the story of a medieval rabbi speaking about the building of the tower of Babel to illustrate this profound human crisis that flows from the savage cult of mammon and leads to slavery. On June 7, he told students in Jesuit schools: "I once read a story about a medieval rabbi in the year 1200. This rabbi explained to the Jews of that time the history of the Tower of Babel. Building the Tower of Babel was not easy. They had to make bricks; and how is a brick made? Mud and straw must be fetched, they must be mixed and the bricks brought to the kiln. It involved a lot of work. And after all this work a brick became a real treasure! They then had to hoist the bricks in order to build the Tower of Babel. If a brick fell it was a tragedy! But if a man fell nothing happened! It is this crisis that we are living today, this same crisis. It is the crisis of the person. Today the person counts for nothing, it is coins, it is money that count. And Jesus, God, gave the world, the whole creation, to the person, to men and women that they might care for it; he did not give it to money. It is a crisis, the person is in a crisis because today — listen carefully, it is true — the person is a slave! We must liberate ourselves from these economic and social structures that enslave us. This is your duty."
- EG 53: "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?"
- This was the main point behind the second on economics and poverty in *Evangelii Gaudium*, that the economy must serve instead of rule, that it must care for human dignity rather than deny or neglect it. This is a message that Pope Francis is hoping we'll all echo because many of our people are under the sway of consumerism, worshipping mammon instead of God.
- He talked about consumerism in the second paragraph of the exhortation: "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless."
- This consumerism has massive spiritual consequences. We see it even in the Church as Fr. Michael White and Tom Corcoran's book *Rebuilt* has powerfully described that many Catholics have become demanding consumers even in terms of the things of God.
- And for us to be part of that solution we need to live the first beatitude and show the treasure that comes from God.
  - Last July to seminarians and novices, he said: "To be joyful witnesses of the Gospel it is necessary to be authentic and consistent. ... In this world to which wealth does so much damage it is necessary that we priests, that we sisters, that all of us be consistent with our poverty! But when you find that money is the principal concern of an educational, parochial or indeed any other institution, this is not good. It is not good! It is an inconsistency! We must be consistent and authentic. On this route, let us do what St Francis says: preach the Gospel with our example and then with words! However, **it is in our life that others must first be able to read the Gospel!**" He added, "Some will say: joy is born from possessions, so they go in quest of the latest model of the smartphone, the fastest scooter, the showy car.... but I tell you, it truly grieves me to see a priest or a sister with the latest model of a car: but this can't be! It can't be. ...I think that cars are necessary because there is so much work to be done, and also in order to get about... but choose a more humble car! And if you like the beautiful one, only think of all the children who are dying of hunger. That's all! Joy is not born from, does not come from things we possess!"
  - (June 11, 2013) "Gospel preaching is born from giving freely, from wonder of salvation which comes; and what I have received freely I must give freely." This is evident when Jesus

sends out his Apostles with instructions for their mission. “His orders are very simple”, the Holy Father emphasized. “Do not provide yourselves with gold, or silver, or copper in your belts...”. It was a mission of salvation that consisted in healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and chasing out demons. And Pope Francis specified that it was to bring people close to the kingdom of God, to give them the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand, indeed it is already here. The key phrase in Christ’s instructions to his disciples is: “you received without pay, give without pay”. These words contain the full gratuitousness of salvation, because: “we cannot preach or proclaim the kingdom of God, without this inner certainty that it is all freely given, it is all grace”. And when we act without leaving room for grace, the Pope said, “the Gospel has no effectiveness”. St Peter, the Holy Father said, “had no bank account and when he had to pay taxes, the Lord sent him to fish in the sea to find money in the fish to pay them. When disciples “want to make a rich Church, a Church without freely given praise, she “ages, she becomes an NGO, she is lifeless”.

- The ninth challenge is to overcome the tendency to turn our faith into an ideology
  - On October 17, at his daily Mass homily at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, he described how many of the Scribes and the Pharisees basically made the Mosaic Law an ideology by focusing on the law itself as a rigid set of principles to be imposed on others rather than on the Legislator and how the law is meant to bring us and others into a life changing relationship with him. Ideological religion becomes an obstacle to true faith. He said, “The faith passes, so to speak, through a distiller and becomes ideology. And ideology does not bring people together. In ideologies Jesus isn’t present, in his tenderness, his love, his meekness. And ideologies are rigid, always, in every way. And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought... For this reason Jesus said to [the Pharisees]: ‘You have taken away the key of knowledge.’ The knowledge of Jesus is transformed into an ideological and also moralistic knowledge, because these close the door with many requirements. ... The faith becomes ideology and ideology frightens, ideology chases away the people, distances the people and distances of the Church of the people. But this is a serious illness, ideological Christians. It is an illness, but it is not new. Already the Apostle John, in his first Letter, spoke of this [with the gnostics]. Christians who lose the faith and prefer ideologies. They become rigid, moralistic, ethical, and without kindness. But how is it that a Christian can become like this? Just one thing: this Christian does not pray,” who doesn’t have a living relationship with God that changes him to become sensitive to what wills, which is something that can happen even when someone is “saying prayers” but not truly praying them.
  - When he met with the bishops of CELAM assembled in Rio on July 28, he said that ideologized Christianity is a real danger: “Making the Gospel message an ideology. This is a temptation that has been present in the Church from the beginning: the attempt to interpret the Gospel apart from the Gospel itself and apart from the Church. An example: Aparecida, at one particular moment, felt this temptation. It employed, and rightly so, the method of “see, judge and act” (cf. No. 19). The temptation, though, was to opt for a way of “seeing” which was completely “antiseptic”, detached and unengaged, which is impossible [prescinding from faith] The way we “see” is always affected by the way we direct our gaze. There is no such thing as an “antiseptic” hermeneutics. The question was, rather: How are we going to look at reality in order to see it? Aparecida replied: With the eyes of discipleship.” He described different forms of Christian ideologies: sociological reductionism [just studying the phenomenon of religion or comparative religions with sociological hermeneutics], psychologizing [reducing spirituality to stages of growing self-awareness instead of encounters with Christ], gnostic solution [making Christianity too much a thing of the head and knowledge, of higher disembodied spirituality, rather than a way of life], the pelagian solution [focusing too much on ourselves and our work and not on God] and the functional solution [that fixes processes and aims at efficiencies but which end up making the Church an NGO focused on quantifiable results and statistics].
  - We priests can sometimes take on at least the appearance of being ideologues if not the reality. We can become more identified with one good cause than we can with the whole mission Christ has entrusted to us in the Church, whether it’s because of our passion for social justice, the care of

immigrants, the protection of the unborn, the defense of marriage, the promotion of the dignity of women, the beauty of the liturgy or the inclusiveness of the liturgy for the Timonium Tims of the world, stewardship, the protection of children from abuse, or various other things. There's a perennial temptation for us to become so concerned about one injustice that we can be perceived to have become ideological with regard to it or sometimes to have become an actual ideologue. And we know that that can happen to our people as well.

- The tenth challenge, and perhaps the most mentioned, is to overcome the culture of gossip. This may seem like a much smaller point than the other more general ones, but for Pope Francis this is the moral issue about which he has spoken up about ten times more than the second most frequent.
  - One of the urgent reforms he has addressing frequently and ferociously is the spiritual cancer of gossip. The largely Italian bureaucracy of the Vatican curia, and the press corps that covers it, thrive on gossip. Rumors — some true, most false — are aired, spread and repeated without a second thought. Even during the papal election, gossip and innuendo — which when properly investigated turned out to be not only mendacious but ludicrous — swirled about some of the leading candidates for the papacy, obviously designed to spike their chances.
  - Pope Francis himself needed to deal with the stir of gossip started by long-time Church haters linking him to the killing and murder of priests in Argentina when he was a Jesuit superior.
  - But the problem of gossip goes way beyond the Vatican or bureaucratic and political institutions in general. It's become such a large part of culture that many people no longer even notice it. Many newspapers, television news and entertainment programs, radio talk shows, and blogs have all become tabloid, dedicating much of their coverage to the latest dirt or hardships facing those in public life. Political parties and candidates are spending increasing resources on opposition research, focusing not just on the legitimate investigation of an opponent's past positions, public votes and actions, but also on the nefarious strip-mining of the person's and his or her family's private life all the way back to grade school.
  - The most insidious and widespread form of gossip of all, however, is what takes place regularly at office water coolers, school corridors and playgrounds, certain websites and via social media tools — like Facebook, Twitter, blogs and comboxes — which while offering many possibilities for good, often devolve into potent platforms for gossip.
  - Gossip, as we all know, also is rife among the clergy. We pass along the latest news, good or bad or worse about the confreres.
  - (July 6 to seminarians and novices) Here we come across another problem. Why do I say this: relations of friendship and brotherhood? So often I have found communities, seminarians, religious or diocesan communities where the most common remarks are gossip! It is terrible! They “flay each other alive”. And this is our clerical or religious world... Excuse me, but it is common: jealousy, envy, criticism of others. Not only speaking badly of our superiors, that's a classic! But I want to tell you that this is so common, so very common. I too have fallen into this. I have often done it, often! And I am ashamed of myself! I am ashamed of this. It is not good to do this: to go and gossip: “Have you heard... have you heard?...”. That community is hell. This is not good for us. For this reason relationships of friendship and brotherhood are important. Friends are few. The Bible says this: friends, one or two.... But brotherhood with everyone. If I have some problem with a sister or brother, I say so to his or her face or I say it to someone who can help, but I do not tell others in order to “blacken” their name. And gossip is terrible! Underlying gossip is envy, jealousy and ambition. Think about this. I once heard of a person who after the spiritual exercises — a consecrated person, a sister... This is good! This sister had promised the Lord never to speak badly of another. This is a beautiful, beautiful way to holiness! Never to speak badly of others. “But father, there are problems”. Tell the superior, tell the Bishop who can remedy them. Do not tell a person who cannot help. This is important: brotherhood! But tell me, would you speak badly of your mother, your father, your siblings? Never. And why do you do so in the consecrated life, at the seminary, in your priestly life? Only this: think, think.... Brotherhood! This brotherly love!
  - Gossip has gone global and it hurts not its objects and subjects, but collaterally damages families, neighborhoods, communities, parishes, the Church and culture.
  - That is why Pope Francis has been ruthlessly and repeatedly going after it, more than any other evil

by far, at this point almost at least once a week.

- In his daily Mass homily on April 9, 2013, he highlighted that gossiping comes from the devil. “When we prefer to gossip, gossip about others, criticize others — these are everyday things that happen to everyone, including me — these are the temptations of the evil one who does not want the Spirit to come to us and bring about peace and meekness in the Christian community.” We need to resist that temptation, he said, by the power of the Holy Spirit, not judging anyone, keeping quiet if we don’t have something constructive to say, and, if we do, then saying it to the person involved and not “to the entire neighborhood.” “If by the grace of the Holy Spirit,” the Holy Father said, “we succeed in never gossiping, it will be a great step forward [and] ... will do us all good.”
- On June 13, commenting in his morning homily on Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, he talked about the “ugly mechanism” that happens “when we denigrate another person ... because we are unable to grow up and need to belittle others, to feel more important.” When “we are not able to keep our tongues in check, we all lose.”
- His most extensive treatment of the evil of gossip came during Mass on May 18 when we said that none of us is immune from this evil. “We all gossip in Church! As Christians we gossip!,” he exclaimed. “The gossip is hurtful. We hurt one another. It is as if we want to put each other down. Instead of growing, I make the other feel small while I feel great. That will not do! It seems nice to gossip ... I do not know why, but it seems nice, like sweet honey, right? You take one [spoonful] and then another, and another, and another, and in the end you have a stomach ache. ... Gossip is like that, isn’t it? It is sweet at first but it ruins you, it ruins your soul!”
- He went on to describe how gossip ruins others as well. “**Rumors are destructive in the Church. It’s a little like the spirit of Cain who killed his brother. It kills his brother!**” He said that gossiping Catholics become “**Christians of good manners and bad habits,**” appearing to many to be faithful, while viciously cutting others down.
- He described three types of gossip that we must all battle against.
  - First, “We supply misinformation. We say only half [the truth] that suits us and not the other half, ... because it is not convenient for us.” We deliberately allow others to draw a false impression of another. We say a person was arrested but fail to add “in a clear case of mistaken identity.”
  - Second, we engage in “defamation,” what the Church has traditionally called detraction. “When a person truly has a flaw [and] it is big, they tell it, 'like a journalist' does, and the character of this person is ruined.” We can all behave like tabloid journalists, airing the dirty laundry of others in public. But those who engage in yellow journalist share only half the blame; those who eagerly listen to it, or buy papers and magazines featuring it, or drive up the Nielsen ratings of those who televise it, likewise bear responsibility.
  - Third, Pope Francis says, “is the slander of saying things that are not true,” which has traditionally been called calumny. Pope Francis compared it to the assassination of an innocent brother.
- He went on to stress the sinful quality of gossip and call people in the Lord’s name to conversion. “All three — disinformation, defamation and slander — are sins! They are sins! It is to slap Jesus in the person of his children, his brothers.” Whatever we do to the least of Christ’s brothers we do to him, the Pope reminds us, and to gossip about anyone is to gossip and hurt Christ himself.
- “How much damage gossip does!,” Francis exclaimed in a June 19 catechesis on how gossip destroys Church unity. He then begged the 85,000 Christians present, and through them, Catholics across the world, “Never gossip about others. Never!”
- It’s important to know how to fight successfully against the temptation to gossip. Pope Francis mentioned it begins with not judging, keeping quiet when we can’t say anything good, and speaking directly to someone if the person needs a fraternal correction. Other important practices would be regular sacramental confession to heal interiorly not only the sins of gossip but the roots that lead to it, forming the habit of thinking well rather than critically of others, giving others the benefit of the doubt, and, if you can’t help speaking about others, speaking good things behind their back.
- Pope Francis is ardently trying to limit that damage and repair it. The reform of the Church, the reform of the priesthood, and the Church’s mission in the world, require it.

- Conclusions
  - So these are ten challenges Pope Francis has been making to us all. Like his namesake St. Francis, Pope Francis recognizes that reform of institutional flow charts is not sufficient, because there needs to be a renewal of the men and women, boys and girls, bishops, priests and deacons, religious and lay, sinners all but hopefully on the way to becoming saints, that comprise the Church.
  - These ten aspects of the reform are an important part of that reshaping and Pope Francis is hoping and praying that we priests will be part of that transformation so that, together with him, we can more effectively announce the good news out to all, including those on the margins, and help them to come to know together with us Jesus in this world so that together we can rejoice in his presence forever.