

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Retreat for the Priests of the Diocese of Lincoln
Our Lady of Good Counsel Retreat Center
Lincoln, Nebraska
May 25-28, 2015

Pope Francis and the Proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom To and For the Poor

- Preface
 - When I wrote this Conference, I didn't realize that I would be giving it in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and out of all the conferences on this retreat, it would be, *prima facie*, because of the subject matter, the conference I would feel least comfortable delivering in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. It's entitled, "Pope Francis and the Proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom To and For the Poor," and in it I hope to tackle our Holy Father's thoughts on some of the larger issues dealing with structures of charity and poverty than I did this morning, in which we pondered, fundamentally, our own call to individual charity to be Good Samaritans. But because we are in the presence of the Truth Incarnate, because we are kneeling and sitting before the one who is the Love of God become man, it is of course possible for us to do so. But to set the stage I'd like to do so with two quotations, one from Pope Francis and the second from the patron saint of preachers.
 - First from Pope Francis. On October 4, 2013, Pope Francis made his first pilgrimage to the place made famous by the saint from whom he took his Pontifical moniker and there his first visit was to Seraphic Institute where very sick and very disabled children are cared for. In that Institute as well, there is perpetual Eucharistic adoration, where people come to adore the Lord and to pray for the children, their families and their care-givers and where the children also go to be loved by Jesus and to love him back. Pope Francis there totally forsook his prepared remarks to connect adoration of the Lord to the care for those in need. He said, "We are among the wounds of Jesus, ... wounds need to be heard, to be acknowledged. ... The Lord Jesus, [after the Resurrection], showed them his wounds and they recognized him. ... My brother Bishop Domenico was saying to me that here you have Adoration. That Eucharistic bread too needs to be heard, because Jesus is present and hidden [under the appearances of] the simplicity and meekness of bread. And here is Jesus hidden in these boys and girls, in these children, in these people. On the altar we adore the Flesh of Jesus; in the people we find the wounds of Jesus. Jesus hidden in the Eucharist and Jesus hidden in these wounds. They need to be heard! ... The wounds should be heard by those who call themselves Christian. The Christian adores Jesus, the Christian seeks Jesus, the Christian knows how to recognize the wounds of Jesus. And today, all of us, here, need to say: "These wounds must be heard!" But there is something else that gives us hope. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, here is the Flesh of Jesus; Jesus is present among you, it is the Flesh of Jesus: the wounds of Jesus are present in these people."
 - The second passage comes from St. John Chrysostom and some of you may be familiar with it. He says that in order to adore the Lord worthily, we must adorn him with love in those who are in need. We pray over the passage in the breviary every 21st Saturday in Ordinary Time. "Do you want to honor Christ's body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: This is my body, and made it so by his words, also said: "You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me." (Mat 25:34ff) What we do here in the church requires a pure heart, not special garments; what we do outside requires great dedication. Let us learn, therefore, to be men of wisdom and to honor Christ as he desires. For a person being honored finds greatest pleasure in the honor he desires, not in the honor we think best. Peter thought he was honoring Christ when he refused to let him wash his feet; but what Peter wanted was not truly an honor, quite the opposite! Give him the honor prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts. Now, in saying this I am not forbidding you to make such gifts; I am only demanding

that along with such gifts and before them you give alms. He accepts the former, but he is much more pleased with the latter. In the former, only the giver profits; in the latter, the recipient does too. A gift to the church may be taken as a form of ostentation, but an alms is pure kindness. Of what use is it to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread, and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs? What profit is there in that? Tell me: If you were to see him lacking the necessary food but were to leave him in that state and merely surround his table with gold would he be grateful to you or rather would he not be angry? What if you were to see him clad in worn-out rags and stiff from the cold, and were to forget about clothing him and instead were to set up golden columns for him, saying that you were doing it in his honor? Would he not think he was being mocked and greatly insulted? Apply this also to Christ when he comes along the roads as a pilgrim, looking for shelter. You do not take him in as your guest, but you decorate floor and walls and the capitals of the pillars. You provide silver chains for the lamps, but you cannot bear even to look at him as he lies chained in prison. Once again, I am not forbidding you to supply these adornments; I am urging you to provide these other things as well, and indeed to provide them first. No one has ever been accused for not providing ornaments, but for those who neglect their neighbor a hell awaits with an inextinguishable fire and torment in the company of the demons. Do not, therefore, adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother, for he is the most precious temple of all."

- With those thoughts about how our Eucharistic adoration is meant to inspire and impel us to care for the wounds of others, we turn to the topic of this conference.

- Introduction

- The most controversial part of *Evangelii Gaudium* was its section on economics. It's what captured all of the headlines when the exhortation appeared. "Pope Francis Denounces Market Based Capitalism," was one representative above-the-fold summary. Many of the articles, rather than focusing on all that the Holy Father had said about evangelization, gave most or all of their copy to what he said about free markets and economics. They regularly repeated some eye-raising statements, especially for many of those we're serving here in the States:
 - "Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system." (54)
 - "The socioeconomic system is unjust at its root" (60)
 - "The economy of exclusion and inequality ... kills"
 - There is a need to "reject the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation" (202)
 - "Inequality is the root of social ills" (202)
 - "We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market"(204)
- Even though elsewhere in the document Pope Francis praised "business" as a "noble vocation" (203), many businessmen on these shores took what Pope Francis was saying as a direct attack. Cardinal Dolan of New York said that some major donors to the capital campaign to renovate St. Patrick's Cathedral expressed serious concerns and some hesitancy to follow through on all of their efforts for the Church. Some wondered how Pope Francis' words meshed with his dependence on international business leaders and business consultants to revamp and lead the Vatican bank, to reorganize Vatican Communications, to examine the flow chart of Vatican dicasteries.
- Some theologians wondered how some of the statements were consistent with St. John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* that the free market appears to be the "most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to [solvent] needs" at the level of individual nations and international relations (34) and that the "business" or "market" or "free economy" understood as "an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector" is "certainly" "the model that ought to be proposed to the

countries of the Third World that are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress” (42).

- What Pope Francis was not trying to do, he said in the exhortation, was to propose an economic model because that is not the Church’s “ambition” “mission” or competence (184). He says that his exhortation “is not a social document” (184). But he adds that pastors “have the right to offer opinions” and “proposals” and to “draw practical conclusions” “lest the great social principles remain mere generalities that challenge no one” (182, 184)
- Scholars can justly question whether his critique applies more to the Gilded Age than the present age, when, especially in the United States, there are very few, except anarcho-capitalists, who think that supply side economics alone will “inevitably” succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness, whether there are those who support the unregulated “absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation,” whether there is a “crude and naïve trust” in the “unseen forces and invisible hand of the market” or in CEOs and major economic actors, and whether businessmen treat as sacred the inner workings of the economic system. There have been several scholarly articles that have made cases that Pope Francis really has in his cross-hairs the crony capitalism that has destroyed the economy in Argentina since Peronism began in 1946, rather than the economic system that has led millions in China, India, Japan, Singapore and other East Asian countries out of poverty. They doubt very much that it applies *en masse* to the real economic set-up in the United States.
- But these considerations, as important as they are, are missing the main point that I think Pope Francis was trying to get to in the exhortation and in many of his other statements during his papacy up until now. Even if he had in mind the corrupt economic system in Argentina that has led to massive unemployment and the creation of a situation in which so many people have been left behind and abandoned in poverty as a few have gotten much richer, the main lines of his moral critique apply to all situations and whether economic set-ups “rule instead of serve.”
- So what I’d like to do in this last conference is to explain where the Pope’s words about the economy and poverty fit into his missionary transformation of the Church. I hope to do so in a way that will help us — whether we’re in poor inner city or rural parishes or relatively affluent ones — not only explain in a way our people can understand what Pope Francis is enunciating but also to help them respond in faith to the profound challenge he is making to all of us, as disciples of Jesus called to be apostles and share the Joy of the Gospel with others — beginning as Jesus did, with proclaiming the Gospel to the Poor. This discussion, I hope, will be particularly helpful as we prepare for Pope Francis’ visit to our country in four months.
- Pope Francis’ background and election
 - I’d like to begin with Pope Francis’ election. Three days after the white smoke emanated from the roof of the Sistine Chapel, he met with journalists present in Rome. I was fortunate to be there. He explained a little bit of what happened in the election and why he ended up choosing as his papal moniker the nickname of the *poverello* of Assisi. He said, “Some people wanted to know why the Bishop of Rome wished to be called Francis. Some thought of Francis Xavier, Francis De Sales, and also Francis of Assisi. I will tell you the story. During the election, I was seated next to the Archbishop Emeritus of São Paulo and Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend, a good friend! When things were looking dangerous, he encouraged me. And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: “Don't forget the poor!” And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. [He began to tap his forehead with his index finger at this time, suggesting he was trying to drill it into a reluctant and perhaps somewhat fearful head.] Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. ... That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!”
 - This was not a new thought for Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, as Cardinal Hummes was reminding him. This was something that was essential to his whole life as a priest and as a bishop. In order to grasp what the missionary transformation of the Church really means for him, in order to capture what he is saying when he is calling the Church to get outside of sick, self-referential, maintenance to take

Christ's mission to those on the existential peripheries, it's useful to see what he did in Argentina with the sprawling slums all around Buenos Aires called the *villas miserias* (villas of misery).

- There are 20 of these slums in which most of the people are forgotten, where drug users and local mafia dons and gangs rule and police normally stay out. Each of them has the population of small cities. Most of the villas are called simply by numbers rather than names because they really have no identity.
- When Jorge Bergoglio became Archbishop, there were only six heroic priests who were living in these bad neighborhoods, despite the obvious need. Many priests didn't want to go. Cardinal Bergoglio began to lead by example, taking the bus there himself, walking the streets, entering homes, celebrating Masses for prostitutes, visiting AIDS patients, keeping contact with the families of the *desparecidos*, confirming all the children one-by-one, entering homes, taking photos, drinking *mate* with them, talking to people about the books they were reading, showing them that even though many in the society and particularly in the government had forgotten about them, he and the Church had not. Even though most were treating them like an "existential garbage heap," the Church was treating them as a treasure, like St. Lawrence treated the poor in Rome. He recognized that drugs and violence were both symptoms of the same disease of marginalization from life with God, from others, from society as a whole and he wanted to replace that culture of exclusion with one of encounter. As one priest who was sent there said to journalist John Allen, "Basically, what society is telling these people is, 'We don't want you to exist.' The work we're doing here is to try to tell them instead, 'It's good that you exist.'"
- Eventually Cardinal Bergoglio started personally asking priests to take those difficult assignments. He changed the formation in the seminary so that seminarians would be prepared to take such assignments rather than cosier ones with fixed rectories, staffs, and the like. By the time he had left, he had quadrupled the number of *curas villeros*, those who share the life of the people down to the minute details.
- The priests who work there say that it was in the *villas miserias* that the future Pope Francis began to crystalize his thinking about how the Church needs to be poor and for the poor, about to how to cure their worst poverty — spiritual — but also to help them fight drugs and violence, receive an education and provide job training and means of self-sufficiency, help the elderly, and give the people a voice.
- The people of these slums call him now "the Pope of the Villa," treating him as one of them.
- His own personal spirit of poverty and his summons to us as priests.
 - We can also see how as a priest, bishop and now as Pope he has always lived in a spirit of poverty not just to identify with the poor but to accompany them. He didn't live in the Archbishop's residence in Buenos Aires near the Presidential Palace but lived in a simple apartment next to the Cathedral, cooking his own noodles, eschewing a car and a driver in order to take public transportation, not buying cardinal vestments but having the cassocks of his rotund predecessor tailored to fit him. His choices as Pope about where to live and the car in which to be transported continue not just the "symbolism" of poverty but the actual life of simplicity toward which he is trying to summon the whole Church to emulate.
 - He has called us priests explicitly to become examples of the first beatitude for all the people, so show what poverty of spirit is and how it leads to the kingdom.
 - 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!"

- PDV 30: On the subject of evangelical poverty, the synod fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his kingdom." In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can understand and practice poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom - that is, with reference to God and his plan. Poverty for the priest, by virtue of his sacramental configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, takes on specific "pastoral" connotations that the synod fathers took up from the Council's teachings and further developed. Among other things, they wrote: "Priests, following the example of Christ, who, rich though he was, became poor for love of us (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9) - should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them, and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things (Optatam Totius, 9; Code of Canon Law, Canon 282)." It is true that "the workman deserves his wages" (Lk. 10:7) and that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14), but it is no less true that this right of the apostle can in no way be confused with attempts of any kind to condition service to the Gospel and the Church upon the advantages and interests which can derive from it. Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth," without traveling bag or personalities, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk. 9:57-62; Mk. 10:17-22). Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Moreover, his awareness of belonging to the one presbyterate will be an incentive for the priest to commit himself to promoting both a more equitable distribution of goods among his fellow priests and a certain common use of goods (cf. Acts 2:42-47). The **interior freedom** which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged; to practice solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society; to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life; and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk. 4:18). Nor should the prophetic significance of priestly poverty be forgotten, so urgently needed in affluent and consumeristic societies: "A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non-submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security." Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the cross with a complete exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters. In accordance with St. Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, the priest should have "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," emptying himself of his own "self," so as to discover, in a charity which is obedient, chaste and poor, the royal road of union with God and unity with his brothers and sisters (cf. Phil. 2:5).
- 2013 Directory of Life and Ministry of Priests: The Priestly Spirit of Poverty Poverty as

Availability The poverty of Jesus has a salvific scope. Christ, being rich, became poor for us so that by his poverty we might become rich. (cf. 2Cor 8:9). The Letter to the Philippians reveals the relationship between the giving of self and the spirit of service that must animate the pastoral ministry. In fact, St. Paul says Jesus did not consider “his equality to God something to cling to, but empties himself to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2:6-7). In all truth, it will be difficult for a priest to become a true servant and minister of his brothers if he is concerned about his own comforts and well being. Through his condition as a poor man Christ manifests that he has received everything from eternity from the Father and returns everything to him unto the complete offering of His life. The example of Christ poor must lead the priest to conform himself to Him, with interior detachment regarding all the world’s goods and riches. The Lord teaches us that the true good is God and that true richness is attaining eternal life: “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mk 8:36-37). Each priest is called to live the virtue of poverty, which consists essentially in consigning his heart to Christ as the true treasure, and not to material things. The priest, whose inheritance is the Lord (cf. Nb 18:20), knows that his mission, like that of the Church, takes place in the midst of the world and that created goods are necessary for the personal development of man. Nonetheless, he will use such goods with a sense of responsibility, moderation, upright intention and detachment proper to him who has his treasure in heaven and knows that everything is to be used for the edification of the Kingdom of God (Lk 10:7; Mt 10:9-10; 1Cor 9:14; Ga 6:6). He will therefore abstain from those lucrative activities that are not consonant with his ministry. Moreover, the priest must avoid offering grounds for even the slightest insinuation that he may conceive his ministry also as an opportunity for obtaining benefits, favoring friends and relatives or seeking positions of privilege. Quite on the contrary, he must be in the midst of all in order to serve others unreservedly, following the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:10). Moreover, recalling that the gift he has received is gratuitous, he is to be disposed to give in like manner (Mt 10:8; Ac 8:18-25) and use what he receives for the exercise of his office for the good of the Church and works of charity, after having provided for his honest sustenance and the fulfillment of all the duties of his state. Lastly, even though the priest does not make a public promise of poverty, it is incumbent upon him to lead a simple life and abstain from whatever may smack of worldliness, thereby embracing voluntary poverty in order to follow Christ more closely. In all aspects (living quarters, means of transportation, vacations, etc.) **the priest is to eliminate any kind of affectation and luxury.** In this sense **the priest must battle every day in order not to lapse into consumerism and the easy life that pervade society in many parts of the world.** A serious examination of conscience will help him to assess his tenor of life, his readiness to attend to the faithful and perform his duties; to ask himself if the means and things he uses respond to true need or if he may not be seeking convenience and comfort, taking flight from sacrifice. Precisely at stake in the consistency between what he says and what he does, especially with respect to poverty, are the priest’s credibility and apostolic effectiveness. Friend of the poorest, he will reserve his most refined and delicate pastoral charity for them, with a preferential option for all the old and new poverties so tragically present in the world, ever recalling that the first misery from which man must be liberated is sin, the ultimate root of all evil.

- Where the section on poverty and the economy fits into *Evangelii Gaudium* and the missionary transformation of the Church.
 - Pope Francis writes that care for the poor is a fruit of the evangelization of individuals and societies. To form someone in the life of the Gospel, to unite someone to Jesus Christ as a member of his body, to allow people to live within the communion of Persons who is our triune God, must have consequences in the way we relate to others, especially the poor.
 - “To evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in the world” (176).

- “The kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centered on charity” (177).
- “Our redemption has a social dimension because God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men. ... The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of that divine communion. ... From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.”
- Pope Francis says that the “inseparable bond between our acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love appears in several scriptural texts ... that we often take for granted, and can repeat almost mechanically, without necessarily ensuring that [they have] a real effect on our lives and in our communities. ... God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: ‘As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: ‘the measure you give will be the measure you get’ (Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy that God has shown us: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.’ ... For this reason, the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being”. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes.”
- He also says, “Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte”, or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. **The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world.** To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society” (181).
- Specifically with regard to the poor, he says, “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.” He mentions how God was always concerned with the poor in the Mosaic law and how God never ceases to hear the cry of the poor. He cites St. James, “The old question always returns: ‘How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?’ (1 Jn 3:17) (187). He adds that this is “not a question of a mission reserved only to a few.” Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mk 6:37) “means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all.”
- Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor and should be scandalized that people starve when there’s plenty of food that is wasted. (192).
- (193) We hear the cry of the poor when we are moved by their suffering, he added. We need to show mercy to receive it. Fathers of the Church gave counter-cultural resistance to self-centered hedonism of paganism.”

- (194) “This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it.” We need to accept exhortations with courage and zeal, without complicating “something so simple” or clouding “something so clear.” We should be concerned with remaining faithful to this call and not just with maintaining doctrinal fidelity.
- He said that the poor have a special place in God’s people. “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself “became poor” (2 Cor 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor. Salvation came to us from the ‘yes’ uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire. The Savior was born in a manger, in the midst of animals, like children of poor families; he was presented at the Temple along with two turtledoves, the offering made by those who could not afford a lamb (cf. Lk 2:24; Lev 5:7); he was raised in a home of ordinary workers and worked with his own hands to earn his bread. When he began to preach the Kingdom, crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). He assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: “Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20); he made himself one of them: “I was hungry and you gave me food to eat”, and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (cf. Mt 25:5ff).
- (198) “For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a **theological category** [one in which God speaks to us and we see God] rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor “his first mercy.” This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have “this mind... that was in Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor that is understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness”. This option – as Benedict XVI has taught – “is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty”. This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom that God wishes to share with us through them.” *We receive more than we give.*
- (200). “The worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”
- More on the preferential option for the poor (Aparecida)
 - 392. Our faith proclaims that Jesus Christ is “the human face of God and the divine face of man.” Hence, “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty.” This option arises out of our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who has become our brother (cf. Heb 2:11-12). Yet it is neither exclusive nor excluding.
 - 393. If this option is implicit in Christological faith, we Christians as disciples and missionaries are called to contemplate, in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters, the face of Christ who calls us to serve Him in them: “The suffering faces of the poor are suffering faces of Christ.” They question the core of the Church’s action, its ministry, and our Christian attitudes. Everything having to do with Christ has to do with the poor, and everything connected to the poor cries out to Jesus Christ: “whatever you did for one of

these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). ...For in Christ the great became small, the strong became weak, the rich became poor.

- 394. Solidarity likewise springs from our faith in Christ as a permanent attitude of encounter, brotherly and sisterly spirit, and service, which is to be manifested in visible options and gestures, primarily in defense of life and of the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded, and in continual accompaniment in their efforts to be agents for changing and transforming their situation. The Church’s service of charity among the poor “is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church's whole activity and her pastoral planning.
- 395. The preferential option for the poor demands that we devote special attention to those Catholic professional people who are responsible for the finances of nations, those who promote employment, and politicians who must create conditions for the economic development of countries, so as to give them ethical guidelines consistent with their faith.
- 396. We commit ourselves to work so that our Latin American and Caribbean Church will continue to be, with even greater determination, a traveling companion of our poorest brothers and sisters, even as far as martyrdom.
- So, in sum, the proclamation of Jesus and the Good News he enfleshes to the poor is an essential, not an optional part of the Church’s mission, equally as important, as Pope Benedict wrote in *Deus Caritas Est*, as the teaching of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments. Scripture will not be fulfilled in our hearing unless Jesus is made present in these ways in his Mystical Body, bringing glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and announcing a year acceptable to the Lord.
- Pope Francis’ critique
 - But it’s crucial for us at the same time to grasp Pope Francis’ critique of the “hardened” or “superficial” or “thorny” soil that prevents the full proclamation of the Gospel to the poor and impoverishes so many from real growth in the faith. There is a false spirituality, an idolatry, at work that hardens our ears and hearts to the cry of the poor and the full implications of the Gospel. In *Evangelii Gaudium* and in so many homilies and speeches throughout his papacy, he has been drawing attention to this. We can tackle several of these.
 - Consumerism
 - He says 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.”
 - 2007 Aparecida document:
 - 50. The greed of the market unleashes the desires of children, youth, and adults. Advertising creates the illusion of distant make-believe worlds where every desire can be satisfied by products that are of an effective, ephemeral, and even messianic nature. The notion that desires should turn into happiness is condoned. Since only the here-and-now is needed, happiness is sought through economic well-being and hedonistic satisfaction.
 - 51. The younger generations are those most affected by this consumer culture in their deep personal aspirations. They grow up under the thrust of a pragmatic and narcissistic individualism, which arouses in them special imaginary worlds of freedom and equality. They affirm the present because the past ceased being relevant in the face of so much social political, and economic exclusion.
 - 357. Hedonistic and individualistic consumerism, which jeopardizes human life for the sake of immediate unbridled pleasure, obscures the meaning of life and degrades it. The vitality offered by Christ invites us to expand our horizons and recognize that

by embracing the daily cross, we enter into the deeper dimensions of existence. The Lord, who invites us to appreciate things and to make progress, also warns us of the danger of the obsession to accumulate: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Mt 6:26). “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?” (Mt 16:26). Jesus Christ offers us a great deal, in fact much more than we expect. He gives the Samaritan woman more than the water from the well, he offers the hungry multitude more than relief from hunger. He surrenders Himself as life in abundance. The new life in Christ is participation in the triune God’s life of love

- 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.
- An Economy of Exclusion
 - (53) “Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. 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 is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.
 - Francis repeatedly cites in his preaching an old tale of rabbis. “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. 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.”
 - Within this context comes his criticism of “trickle-down economic theories.”
 - (54) “Some people continue to defend trickle-down (*derrame*) theories which assume that (*all*) economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably (rather, *by itself*) succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.”
 - The main point that he wants to make here is not economic analysis but moral analysis. “To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal,” he goes on to say, “a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something

new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.”

- On the point of the globalization of indifference, we need to turn to what he said in Lampedusa.
 - 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.”
- He is trying to foment a totally different type of culture:
 - Syria Vigil (Sept 7, 2013): “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.”
- But in order for that to occur, we have to overcome, indeed smash, the ferocious idolatry of money
 - (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 a July 27, 2013 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.”
 - He reiterated the point in Cagliari, Sardinia, stressing that it endangers man’s future: “An economic system ... leads to this tragedy; an economic system centered on an idol called “money”. God did not want an idol to be at the center of the world but man, men and women who would keep the world going with their work. Yet now, in this system devoid of

ethics, at the center there is an idol and the world has become an idolater of this “god-money”. Money is in control! Money lays down the law! It orders all these things that are useful to it, this idol. And what happens? To defend this idol all crowd to the center and those on the margins are done down, the elderly fall away, because there is no room for them in this world! Some call this habit “hidden euthanasia”, not caring for them, not taking them into account... “No, let’s not bother about them...”. And the young who do not find a job collapse, and their dignity with them. Do you realize that in a world where youth — two generations of young people — have no work that this world has no future.

- This idolatry of money leads to a “new tyranny ... invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules.” He cites crippling international debt, widespread corruption, tax evasion, thirst for power, and destruction of the environment, which he says “is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule” (56).
- This ferocious idolatry of money leads to a financial system that rules rather than serves because it has lost a sense of God and what his expectations are for all of us.
 - (57) “Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human, because it makes money and power relative. It is felt to be a threat, since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. In effect, ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response that is outside of the categories of the marketplace. When these latter are absolutized, God can only be seen as uncontrollable, unmanageable, even dangerous, since he calls human beings to their full realization and to freedom from all forms of enslavement. Ethics – a non-ideological ethics – would make it possible to bring about balance and a more humane social order.”
 - (58) “A financial reform open to such ethical considerations would require a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders. I urge them to face this challenge with determination and an eye to the future, while not ignoring, of course, the specifics of each case. Money must serve, not rule! The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and a return of economics and finance to an ethical approach that favors human beings.”
- This practical atheism in the economic sphere can spawn a general spiritual worldliness even among believers.
 - Pope Francis has been speaking about spiritual worldliness since before his papacy. It’s one of the main categories of a typical Ignatian retreat on the spiritual exercises. 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 20th 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 at a Pentecost Vigil— “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, in our own and others’ efforts, rather than in God. When this happens within the Church, he told the Bishops of CELAM in Rio: “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”.

- He pondered this in depth in *Evangelii Gaudium*.
 - (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.’
 - (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 promethean 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.
 - (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.
 - (96) “This way of thinking also feeds the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight. How often we dream up vast apostolic projects, meticulously planned, just like defeated generals! But this is to deny our history as a Church, which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be, for all work is “the sweat of our brow”. Instead, we waste time talking about “what needs to be done” – in Spanish we call this the sin of “*habriaqueísmo*” – like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.”
 - (97) “Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise

questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. **This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good.** We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centeredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!

- Some thoughts from the new Archbishop of Chicago
 - In a speech in June 2014 in Washington, now Archbishop Blaise Cupich accurately framed what Pope Francis was trying to do in terms of anthropology. It was during a conference showing the contrast between Pope Francis' ideas and those of radical libertarianism. We can legitimately question how many radical libertarians there are, especially in control of the financial system in our country, but even if the “opposition” has some characteristics of a straw man, we do see some fingerprints of libertarian anthropology in the way that many do approach the financial sector. It's worthwhile for us to listen carefully to Archbishop Cupich's elucidation of what Pope Francis is really about, because his appointment on Saturday was a clear indication, it seems to me, that Pope Francis believes that the new Archbishop gets what he's been trying to say.
 - “The vision of Pope Francis and the vision of his libertarian critics,” Archbishop Cupich said, “constitute two compellingly different pathways for humanity at this moment in history. These conflicting pathways are based on two utterly divergent conceptions of the nature of the human person. ... These differing anthropologies put libertarianism and Catholic Social Teaching on two distinct trajectories when it comes to the meaning of economic life, and the goal of politics in a world of globalization. It is important to recognize in fairness that many libertarians share with Catholic Social Teaching a respect for human dignity. Human dignity anchors their insistence on human freedom. They rightly argue that this dignity is not given by society but by the Creator and therefore freedom, self-determination and all other human rights are inalienable, echoing the principals in the documents of democracy. However, they stop short in considering what this means. ... Since this dignity belongs to all human beings in common, it implies the solidarity of all peoples. By uncoupling human dignity from the solidarity it implies, libertarians move in a direction, that not only has enormous consequences for the meaning of economic life, and the goal of politics in a world of globalization, but in a direction which is inconsistent with Catholic Social Teaching, particularly as it is developed by Pope Francis. Let me put this more sharply:
 - For Francis the human person seeks and claims an integral development, morally, spiritually and emotionally, which is joined intrinsically to the communities that sustain him. For the Pope's critics, the human person is the autonomous individual, man the producer and man the consumer.
 - For Francis inclusion and economic security for all are measures of economic health in contrast to the one-dimensional measure of economic growth proposed by his critics for decision-making in the growing age of globalization.
 - For Francis, politics seeks the common good. For his libertarian critics, politics seeks to maximize the freedom of markets and individual choice.
 - For Francis the strength of globalization leads to the need for global structures that help mold the forces of market capitalism to advance solidarity and dignity for all. For libertarians market forces left to themselves are the best arbiters of economic progress.
 - Archbishop Cupich went on to say that the “unique contribution Pope Francis makes to Catholic Social Teaching” comes from “using as his starting point real life experience rather than competing ideas. In other words the Pope offers a different epistemology, a different approach to how we know and learn or better how we are informed. ... Some of the Pope's critics say that

his views on the economy are wanting precisely because he speaks out of the limited experience of living in Argentina with its difficult economic and political history or that he is just uninformed about capitalism and a market economy, especially its claims of reducing global poverty. But I think those who easily dismiss what the Pope is saying because of his turn to real life experience fail to appreciate that he is calling people to a **more authentic way of knowing and learning.** He is challenging them about how they are informed. And, in fact, herein lies what I believe is how we should understand his unique contribution to the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Instead of approaching life from the thirty thousand feet level of ideas, he challenges policy makers and elected officials – indeed all of us - to experience the life of everyday and real people. His pithy phrase in the *Joy of the Gospel* says it all: *Reality is greater than ideas.* Ideas cannot be disconnected from realities; the two must be in dialogue. He is concerned that leaders and policy makers “are stuck in the realm of pure ideas” thus disconnected from realities. Ideas are important as they can classify and define, but realities call us to action. Living in the world of ideas only, without being tethered to reality, is a particular risk for leaders in the West and especially in the U.S. We can become quite content to quote statistics, sift through and interpret data, categorize populations, all the while remaining indifferent to and unaware of the needs of real people. To paraphrase the Pope, this approach is a dead end, for it only creates “ethical systems bereft of kindness” and carries on “intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom.” Much like he told religious leaders, Francis is saying that politicians and policy makers need to know the smell of the sheep, otherwise their objectives will be more ideal than real, and reality will be masked in empty rhetoric using “a rationality foreign to most people.” In our country and particularly in an era when campaign fundraising absorbs so much of an elected official’s time, the Pope’s words are particularly challenging. But they are also a challenge to any of us who, already having our place at the table of life, find it more secure to speak of the economy in the world of ideas rather than risk testing them by visiting the reality of the excluded and marginalized – thereby making sure that ideas do dialogue with reality.

- “Pope Francis is not interested in providing an economic plan or system. Rather, his first goal is to call believers, call us all, to a **renewed encounter with the Risen Christ,** so that our lives may be marked by the joy that sets us “free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness” to the point that we are compelled to invite others to enter into and participate in that same encounter, life and joy. Everything else for the believer is relative. Everything else, our economy, politics, social programs, our life styles are all measured by how they help or hinder others in participating in the life God has destined for humanity and in experiencing God’s loving encounter. The Pope isn’t asking us to give over our wallets but to give over our lives to bringing about the Kingdom of God in our midst. This is not about adopting an economic system that stifles personal initiative and creativity, nor for that matter is it about baptizing a market driven economy to the point that it sends the message, especially to our youth, that it is ok to organize your life around trying to make as much money as you can as long as you occasionally are generous to the needy. No, the Pope’s invitation is much more profound: Is sharing with others the joy of our encounter with Christ our priority? Or do we seek to deal with our sin, sorrow, emptiness and loneliness on our own terms? And specifically when it comes to inviting the poor to participate in the life God is calling us all to share, we have to deal with their real life situation not only that they are in want but that they are excluded. It is within this context that he calls for a shift from an economics of exclusion to a culture of encounter and the need for accompaniment. One encounters another, not one self. One accompanies another, not one self. This emphasis on encounter and accompaniment unmask the difficulty with libertarianism, for its stated goal is to increase human autonomy as the priority.

- Summary

- Pope Francis says: “If anyone feels offended by my words, I would respond that I speak them with affection and with the best of intentions, quite apart from any personal interest or political ideology. My words are not those of a foe or an opponent. I am interested only in helping those who are in thrall to an individualistic, indifferent and self-centered mentality to be freed from those unworthy

chains and to attain a way of living and thinking which is more humane, noble and fruitful, and which will bring dignity to their presence on this earth.” (208)

- He added, “I fear that these words too may give rise to commentary or discussion with no real practical effect. That being said, I trust in the openness and readiness of all Christians, and I ask you to seek, as a community, creative ways of accepting this renewed call.”
- He is hoping on us to lead that charge and change, in cooperation and response to God’s grace, saying, “Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk” (207).
- His reform involves a poor Church for the poor so that we may all the better give witness to the treasure of heaven, to the pearl of great price, to Jesus who himself chose to become poor to enrich us and then joyfully turns to all of us and says first, “Come, follow me!,” and then, “Go!,” go to the whole world — even to the extremes and peripheries — and proclaim the Gospel, teaching them to carry out everything I have commanded you. He never calls us to anything unless he’s prepared to give us all the help he knows we need to do it. Through his earthly vicar, he is trying to give us some of that assistance.