

# Midwest Holy Cross Associates

## “The Joy of the Gospel” Pope Francis’ Gift for Our Time

### INTRODUCTION

Why Francis? Like our founder, Father Moreau, both have had a special influence on the people of their time. Francis like Moreau is grounded in reality and wants to create a family spirit in the Church. It is not a coincidence the theme for the first synod of Francis’ pontificate is FAMILY.

### About Francis

Who is Francis? His name is Jorge Bergoglio.

His beginnings are rooted in both the Italian and Argentinian cultures. Jorge Bergoglio’s grandparents moved from the Piedmont area of Italy to Argentina because his Grandfather had three brothers who were already in Buenos Aires since 1922. Italians have a great gift for wanting to be with family and that is what drew them to Argentina and also the need to start a new life after the First World War, and Argentina was a place of peace and progress at that time. Jorge was one of five children. He learned Italian from his grandmother who had a special place in his heart. Francis says he remembers his parents playing with their children and cooking.

Jorge learned how to cook. His mother was paralyzed after the birth of her 5<sup>th</sup> child, so she would tell him what to do and what to add and he remembered. Later the religious had to do their own cooking on Sundays. When Francis was asked about his cooking, Francis said, “Well, no one ever died.”

Jorge’s father took him to basketball games and his mother had all the children listen to the opera on the radio on Saturdays. Jorge also loved the tango and danced and watched it being danced as part of his Argentinian culture.

His father wanted his children to have a work ethic. Jorge went to a technical school after he finished his primary education; he began working in a laboratory dedicated to dietary nutrition. The head of the laboratory was Esther Balestrino, a real mentor for him. During this time he got to see the good and the bad of human endeavors. It grounded him in reality.

Both Esther, her daughter and son-in-law were kidnapped and along with two nuns were murdered by the dictator of the country.

His spiritual journey takes a significant turn when he was planning to go out with his friends and finds himself stopping off at church and meeting a priest he'd never seen before. The priest conveyed such a great sense of spirituality he asked to go to confession. In that experience he says: "For me, God is the One who surprises you. You search for Him, but he searches for you first." The compassionate way that God called him - in such a beautiful way that, over time, it became a source of inspiration for his ministry.

What became clear to him was his religious calling. After studying in an archdiocesan seminary, he ultimately entered the Society of Jesus to become a religious priest.

In his life as minister, Jorge had the admiration of his people as being a humble priest, respected teacher, a wise and adroit bishop and cardinal who showed special preference for the poor and suffering. His reputation became well known throughout the Church and at the previous conclave the number of cardinals voting for him as the next pope matched those of Benedict. At this point Francis released his votes and asked that they be turned over to Benedict.

Jorge chose "Francis I" for his name to honor St. Francis' love of the poor and his charge to "rebuild the Church."

Along with Scripture we will be reflecting on Francis' words from "The Joy of the Gospel – *Evangelii Gaudium*," his dream for the Church now and for the future.

## **The “Lectio Divina” Process for Praying the Scriptures:**

The desert fathers and mothers in the early church had a very unique way of spending an entire day in reflection on a passage of Scripture. Their method, known as “lectio divina,” has come down through the centuries as an important way of growing in the spiritual life. It consists in reading a passage of Scripture three times. Each time the passage will contain more meaning as the reader begins to apply its message to his or her own life.

Follow these instructions as you reflect on Scripture and on the readings as part of your monthly chapter meetings:

The group leader chooses volunteers to read a selected scriptural passage three times.

Prior to the first reading, the chapter spends a moment in silent prayer asking the Holy Spirit to be present in this discernment process.

It would be helpful for all to have reflected on the readings before the session.

Before the first reading, the group leader says, “As we read the passage for the first time, choose a word or phrase that captures your attention.” (No further explanation here). After the passage is read, the group leader says, “Take a moment to reflect on that word or phrase.” After a short period of reflection, the group leader shares only his/her word or phrase and then invites others in the group to share theirs. It is important to allow enough time for all to participate.

Before the second reading, the group leader says, “As we read the passage for the second time, listen for a personal message God is giving you. It could have something to do with the word or phrase you have already chosen”. After the passage is read, the group leader says, “Take a moment to hear the message God has for you in this passage. I will begin by sharing first and then I will invite others to share”. It is important to allow two or three minutes before the leader shares his/her thoughts. Some members will need this time to receive the significance of the passage for them. After the group leader shares, he/she invites others to share. Stress the importance of sharing aloud. Each individual sharing is a gift to the group and has special significance for the community.

Before having someone read the passage for the third time, the group leader says, “As we read the passage for the third time, listen for a call from God. What direction does God want you to take during the coming month? I will begin by sharing first and then I will invite others to share”. It is important to allow two or three minutes before the leader shares his or her thoughts. After the group leader shares, he or she invites others to share.

At the end of the process the group leader asks the group how God is leading the chapter for the coming month.

### **Modification to the “Lectio Divina” Process**

We are adding a fourth element to the lectio process. REST. Take a few moments of quiet time recalling the prayer of the Chapter. Say it quietly to yourself as a means of making it more vivid and adding to its importance as you live with it through the month.



## Chapter One

### **Lord, Help Me Experience the Gospel's Joy**



Gospel joy attracts people when it is genuine. We want to experience what joyful people experience. They light up the environment. They bring hope to the rest of us.

#### Pope Francis' Words

“The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. In the Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.” (#1, The Joy of the Gospel)

#### Luke 1: 39-47

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me?

For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled”.

And Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior”.

### **Further Questions**

**LORD, HELP ME EXPERIENCE THE GOSPEL’S JOY.** How does this prayer speak to you?

How could this prayer, if repeated through the month, change your attitude toward life?

## Chapter two

### Lord, Show Me Your Infinite Love



Modern life is complex. There are no easy answers at times to the dilemmas that we face. At these times Jesus is with us. We might not feel his presence but if we remain on the path he has set for us, he will eventually show us his infinite love.

#### Pope Francis' words

“There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand that grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress.”

(#6, The Joy of the Gospel)

Lam 3:17,21-23,26

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness... It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

### Further Questions

What effect did the prayer for last month, "**LORD, LET ME EXPERIENCE THE GOSPEL'S JOY**", have on your outlook through the month?

How does this new prayer, **SHOW ME YOUR INFINITE LOVE**, speak to you?

When you repeat this new prayer over and over for the month, **SHOW ME YOUR INFINITE LOVE**, what do you think its effect would be?

## Chapter Three

### The Love of Christ urges me on



When much of the focus of modern life is on me and my wants, Christ through Francis urges me to help others as a way of gaining perspective on what makes life so rich.

#### Pope Francis' words

“Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.

(#9, The Joy of the Gospel)

2 Cor 5:14-15, 17-21

For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

### Further Questions

What effect did last month's prayer, **LORD, SHOW ME YOUR INFINITE LOVE**, have on your outlook?

**THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES ME ON.** How does this new prayer speak to you?

## Chapter Four

### Lord, Renew My Life with the Freshness of the Gospel



A creative artist in any media has not arrived until he or she surrenders to the divine artist within to create something true, good and beautiful.

#### Pope Francis' words

Quoting St. Irenaeus, Francis says, "By his coming, Christ brought with him all newness". "With this freshness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always 'new.'" (# 11, The Joy of the Gospel)

Is 40: 28-31

Do you not know or have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny. He gives strength to the fainting; for the weak he makes vigor abound. Though the young faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall, they that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; walk and not grow faint.

### Further Questions

Did last month's prayer, renew and bring a new relevance to your prayer life?

How could the prayer for this month, **LORD, RENEW MY LIFE WITH THE FRESHNESS OF THE GOSPEL**, give you a fresh outlook?

## Chapter Five

### Lord, Let Your Spirit Work Through Me



Life is full with the spirit leading you. Open your heart to be filled with a love and fire that cannot be quenched.

#### Pope Francis' words

“Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord’s work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is ‘the first and greatest evangelizer’. In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative that ‘he has loved us first’ and that he alone gives the growth.” (#12, The Joy of the Gospel)

1 John 4:15,18-19, 1 Cor 3:7-9

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. There is no fear in love, perfect love drives out fear. We love because he first loved us.

Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building.

### Further Questions

Did the prayer from last month prayer, **LORD RENEW MY LIFE WITH THE FRESHNESS OF THE GOSPEL**, help you see the Gospel in a new light?

When you repeat this month's prayer, **Lord, LET YOUR SPIRIT WORK THROUGH ME** did it help in experiencing God's presence throughout your day?

## Chapter Six

### Lord, Help My Life Be a Witness to Those Searching for You



Actions speak louder than words. Who you are and what you do speak more about you than what you say. With so much duplicity, we must strive to live what we say we believe. Not to make it a reality, is to build on sand. This is especially true in our relationships with the poor.

Pope Francis' words:

“Ideas - conceptual elaborations - are at the service of communication, understanding and praxis. Ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. Realities are greater than ideas. This principle impels us to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful. Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centeredness.” (#232, The Joy of the Gospel)

1 John 4:2, 7-9

This is how you can know the Spirit of God; every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.

### Further Questions

What effect did last month's prayer, **LET YOUR SPIRIT WORK THROUGH ME**, have during this month?

How does this month's prayer, **LORD, HELP MY LIFE BE A WITNESS TO THOSE SEARCHING FOR YOU**, encourage you to step out in new ways to evangelize through your new life in Christ?

## Chapter Seven

### Lord, Help Me See the Gifts Others Bring into My Life



Holy Cross Associates share our lives and our gifts with one another. We give witness by reaching out with compassion to all.

Pope Francis' words

“If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.”  
(# 246, The Joy of the Gospel)

Matt. 5:9, Is 2:4-5

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

### Further Questions

How did last month's prayer, **LORD, HELP MY LIFE BE A WITNESS TO THOSE SEARCH FOR YOU**, help you reach out to others helping them see your Christian witness?

How will this month's prayer, **LORD, HELP ME SEE THE GIFTS OTHERS BRING INTO MY LIFE**, help you see the importance of community in living the abundant life that Christ promised?

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