



Keynote Address 2014

John Allen Jr was the keynote speaker at the inaugural Faith & Life Convention in 2014. John L. Allen Jr. is an associate editor of *The Boston Globe*, which carries his Sunday column, *All Things Catholic* and associate editor of the *Globe's* new website, *Crux*, specializing in coverage of the Vatican and the Catholic Church.

He has written nine books on the Vatican and Catholic affairs, and also is a popular speaker on Catholicism both in the United States and internationally. *The Tablet* has called John “the most authoritative writer on Vatican affairs in the English language.” When he was called upon to put the first question to Pope Benedict XVI aboard the papal plane heading to the United States in April 2008, the Vatican spokesman said to the pope: “Holy Father, this man needs no introduction.”



John Allen's Address

The 3 Pillars of the Francis' papacy are

- 1: Leadership as service
- 2: A Missionary Church, with Mission defined in its broadest possible sense
- 3: Mercy as the core Christian message at this moment in time

Leadership as Service



In the early days after Francis' election it was of course those gestures of personal simplicity and humility that took the world by storm. Right, we all remember that when he left the Sistine chapel after his election he didn't get into the chauffeur driven Mercedes but he popped on the shuttle bus with the other cardinals. The fact that he went back to his residence before the conclave to pack his own things

and settle his bill, the fact that he chose not to live in the Papal apartment but stay in room 201 at Santa Marta, and that he took the time to cancel his subscription in Buenos Aires to his newspaper.

None of those were faux public relation exercises they arose very naturally from the personality and instincts of Jorge Bergolio. As you know during the 15 years when he was Arch bishop of Buenos Aires, he did not live in the Archbishop Palace, instead he lived in a modest, spartan apartment, downtown near the Cathedral. He had to leave the stove on 24/7 during the winter because the building could not afford central heat.

Those gestures we saw were not calculated, they were not cooked up in a PR world.

At the same time if you want the 64,000 \$ insight into Pope Francis the one thing that you dare never forget about the man, here is the big bold truth. It is, beneath that humble simple exterior lies the mind of a brilliant Jesuit politician, he knows what he is doing all the time. So when he was sending those signals with a new spirit of humility and simplicity. He wasn't simply letting his own personality shine through, he was also very deliberately trying to set a new standard for what leadership in the Catholic Church looks like.

I think what Pope Francis wants on this score; he wants to achieve a capernaucan revolution in people's perceptions of authority in Catholicism. What he wants is when people see the symbols of office in the Catholic Church, when they see Roman collars, he wants them to think not in terms of power and privilege but rather in terms of service. And this by the way is not a journalistic theory; Pope Francis has said this out loud. A couple of months after his election, he brought all of his Papal Nuncios all to Rome for a meeting and he said, what we do not need are leaders who have the psychology of a prince, those are his words. Instead we are looking for, and again this is his terms, shepherds who carry the smell of their sheep because they are close to ordinary people they are called to serve. That's the kind of leadership in which Pope Francis is interested. And he believes that the one key to that is making sure that the accent is always on service and on proximity to the poor.

We also now know, ladies and gentlemen, that Pope Francis is also prepared to take action to back it up. And the proof of that comes from his intervention in the diocese ofin

Germany and the famous bling bishop. This is Bishop Fonz.....The bishop who became famous for spending, I believe the final price tag of \$40 million dollars remodelling his residence. When this all became public Pope Francis first dispatched an investigator, he then gave the Bishop an unspecified period of sabbatical outside the Diocese and the story reached its climax when the Pope accepted the Bishops resignation. In the Catholic world this was a shock, it opened eyes and ears around the world because it said the Pope is serious about this, it sort of set a new tone. That is one pillar of the Francis revolution, he wants leadership to be perceived as a vehicle for service not for protecting one's own interest or for building empires.

Second component is a missionary church, mission defined in the broadest sense. Let's begin with stating the obvious which is being Pope is a tough job. Think about what we expect Pope's to do. We expect them to be the CEO's of a religious multinational, we expect them to be a living saint, we expect them to be political genius', we expect them to be intellectual giants, we expect them to be media rockstars. Any one of these things is very difficult to do well when you put them all together it is an impossible burden. Inevitably Popes can emphasise any one or other of these roles. When Pope Francis gets out of bed in the morning how does he think to himself, what dimension of the Papacy does he put the greatest emphasis on. I guarantee you it is not being a bureaucrat, it is not being a diplomat, it is not being a politician. Fundamentally he thinks about himself as the missionary in chief of the Catholic Church. His aspiration as always, is to relight the missionary fires of Catholicism in his time. By the way, if you want the sound bite for that, his famous phrase is, he wants the church to get out of the sacristy and into the street, basically a call to mission.



In terms of how he defines mission, I think he sees it in the broadest possible sense. For him mission is not an extraction, so when mission takes on flesh and blood it becomes real. It is recognising the people right in front of you. Particularly those people who are right in front of you who have a special need for a taste of God's love and compassion. So for example when you see him in St. Peter's square stopping the Pope mobile and getting down and making his way across the square to embrace a man who was horribly disfigured by boils. The kind of guy that most people would walk across the street to avoid, when he seen doing that, that is mission in action.

When you see him inviting a 16 year old Italian teenager with Down's syndrome up onto the Pope mobile to join him for a swing around the square. That is mission in action. When he invited 3 homeless men to join him for his birthday breakfast, all of that is an expression of mission. They are not just cheap PR exercises, they are intended to teach us what mission should look like.

However in his mind, mission certainly has a social component as well and here he is very much a pope of the social gospel. A brief word about the Pope's social agenda, at the beginning you may remember he gave a series of interviews to a number of media outlets. One of the things he said in a couple of those interviews was that he does not believe he needs to talk all the time on issues such as abortion gay marriage and contraception because the Churches teaching on those issues are already well known. And in some quarters I think there was some fear that he was somehow pulling back from an aggressive, defensive culture of life. Ladies and gentlemen, take it from me, nothing is further from the truth, this is a robustly pro-life point, the Pope made the proof if needed. For one, the day after those interviews rolled out he gave a speech to a group of Italian physicians, which is one of the toughest pro-life speeches you will ever hear a Pope give. In which he defined the right to life as the primordial human right, the one upon which the structure of all the other human rights is built.



The other is that during his trip in August to South Korea, he made an addition to the schedule for that trip too, something which was his personal choice. He visited a cemetery for the victims of abortion on a hill behind a major medical facility, this very evocative space filled with white crosses on a grassy hilltop, beneath a statue of the Holy Family. He stood there for more than a minute in silent prayer commemorating the victims of abortion. So there is no question about this Pope's commitment to the gospel of life.

That said, I think Francis also believes there are some other components of Catholic Social teaching that have not always gotten the same level of attention and he wants to lift them up. In particular solidarity with the immigrants, solidarity with the poor, opposition to war would be core elements of his agenda. One piece of evidence would be that his very first trip outside Rome on the 8th July 2013, was to the Southern Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, which particularly for Italians, Lampedusa is a metaphor for impoverished migrants from Africa and the Middle East who were making their way up and trying to get into Europe. In the last two decades 20,000 people have died trying to make the trip. Pope Francis went there and laid a wreath in the sea to commemorate the victims and then he condemned what he called a globalisation of indifference to people on the margins. That in his mind is mission in action.

His intervention against the war in Syria, his constant rhetoric of solidarity with the poor, his famous phrase that he dreams of a poor church for the poor. These in his mind are not just political decisions, they are not intended merely to recalibrate the political agenda of the Catholic Church, much deeper than that, they are the leading edge of mission. They are the leading edge in his mind of what inviting people into the fellowship of Jesus Christ looks like

in action. All of it predicated on the drive to see a dynamic, sometimes rambunctious and occasionally messy missionary community.

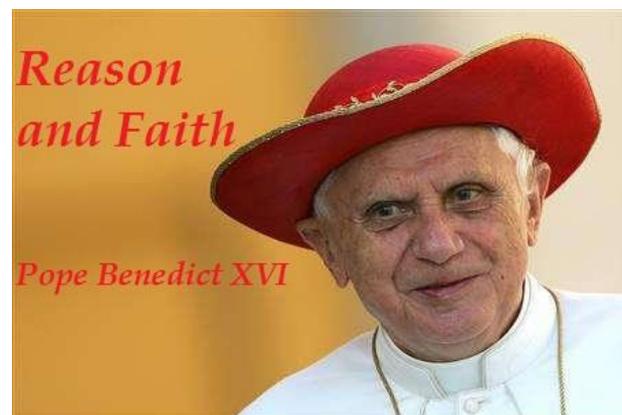
Finally, mercy is the core Christian message. In my time I have covered three Popes, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and now Francis. They have all be remarkable thinkers, they have all been deeply complex men, and it is impossible to boil them down to handy dandy, simplistic little soundbites. Having said that, let me offer you a simplistic little sound bite for each one of them. They are all ones that these guys gave us themselves, because each of these three popes have a signature phrase that cut to the heart of a lot of what they were about.



With John Paul II there is no doubt whatsoever what his signature phrase was. It was 'Be Not Afraid', that was the famous phrase he uttered standing in Victory square in Warsaw, Poland in 1979 that set the dominos in motion which led to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. It was the phrase that he repeated at every world youth day. It was this invitation to get up off the mat and to wake up from the

dogmatic slumber and to recapture the missionary swagger.

With Benedict XVI, I don't think there is much question what the central phrase was, it was 'Reason and faith' that was the heart of the pitch Benedict XVI was trying to make to the world for 8 very difficult years. It was that reason and faith need one another, that human reason shorn of religious faith becomes scepticism and nihilism. Faith shorn of the capacity for critical reflection becomes extremism and fundamentalism. These things need to be in a relationship in order to be healthy.



It is still early in the game for Pope Francis, we are 18 months into his Papacy but already it is clear what his signature phrase is, as it is something he repeats over and over. The line is 'The Lord never tires of forgiving', and sometimes he adds, it is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. Fundamentally it is a message of mercy. Mercy, ladies and gentlemen, is quite literally this Popes motto. His motto is a latin line, which is a little hard to translate to English but basically it means is choosing with mercy, using mercy as the basis for making decisions. That was his motto when he was the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and he has chosen to carry it with him as Pope. References to mercy abound, I think if you did a text study and took every word that Pope Francis has said since his election, I guarantee you that the single, most common term that he has used is mercy. In his first Sunday homily as Pope,

which he chose to not do in St. Peter's Basilica but in St. Anne's Church, he had no prepared text. In fact it was an impromptu reflection on mercy. He began by saying 'I hope the theologians in this world will forgive me but in my opinion the strongest message of the Lord is mercy.'

Mercy runs like a scarlet thread through his reflection on virtually every issue. We were on the Papal plane coming back from Brazil and he did the first of the impromptu press conferences that he does. One of the questions we asked Pope Francis was the pastoral care of divorced and remarried Catholics, which as you know is a political football in the life of the Church for a long time. He gave an answer which seemed to suggest he was open to some change on that front. He then went on to say that he would like to make a bigger point and that is, 'I believe that we are living in a Kairos of mercy', using that evocative Greek, New Testament term, which means a privileged moment in God's plan of salvation. This is a Pope who understands his Papacy, who understands the moment we are living in, as a divinely ordained moment for the message of mercy to get a new lease on life. I am convinced that everything he is doing, from the nitty, gritty details of how he reformed the Vatican Bank, all the way up to 'what should the Holy See's line on Syria be?' All of it fundamentally is predicated on the desire that when the outside world looks at the Catholic Church what they will see is a community of mercy.

A community that doesn't merely pay lip service for mercy but actually practices it in its life. Pope Francis is not naïve, he understands that as a minister of the Christian gospel he has two obligations. He has to pronounce both God's judgment and God's mercy on all. One without the other would be an over simplification. But I think his belief is that the world has heard our judgment on multiple fronts with crystal clarity, now is the time for them to hear, to see, to smell, to taste and to feel our mercy.

If you want additional proof by the way on the point, mercy is not just in the Pope's speech it is also in his actions. One place you will see that is the ardent devotion he has to celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. As you know the Pope is also the Bishop of Rome and Francis takes that element of the job description seriously. So far he has made 7 visits to parishes in Rome, trying to get around and engage in the local life of the Church. His first parish visit came on the 21st May 2013, he went to a local working class Roman neighbourhood. We were sitting waiting for it to start and we started to hear the helicopter, we first thought it was the Italian security guys doing a fly over to make sure everything was OK but no, we suddenly realised that it was the Papal helicopter. The Pope is there 45 minutes early, he gets out of the helicopter and says to the local priest, I'm sorry for the early start but I know I am supposed to say Mass but in addition to all of that I would also like to hear some confessions. The priest ran and grabbed 8 people who were waiting in line to see the Pope, and told them they were going to confession. When he told them, they said but we don't want to miss seeing the Pope, his response was 'Trust me you are going to see the Pope'. One by one, Francis sat there in a modest confessional, in working class

neighbourhood listening to people confess their sins. In part, as a savvy Jesuit politician, it was important to him that the world sees the Pope making a point of celebrating the Church's premier right of mercy.

In the media business we have coined all kinds of cute little monikers for this Pope, we describe him as the 'People's Pope' or the 'Pope of the Poor', all of those things capture something. If you want my prediction on how Pope Francis is going to be remembered in the long run of history, I believe he is going to go down as the Pope of Mercy. I think when the last word on his papacy is in that is going to be the best way to capture what this Pope tried to be about.

All of this is in some way fascinating, definitely exciting. In any event it has certainly captured the interest and imagination of people all over the world. It is an empirical fact that the first time in a long time, interest in the Church is not just an inside Catholic phenomenon but has become a mass market story in a positive key. In other words, what Francis has done is clear a space in which we have the opportunity to re-introduce ourselves to a jaded, often sceptical, sometimes justifiably hostile secular world. The question is what are we going to do with it because the message is I want to leave you with is this, yes Francis in many ways is setting out bold new directions for the Church, yes of course the Pope can change history, but I guarantee if we are going to take advantage of this new moment of missionary opportunity, the wrong strategy to do that is to wait for Francis to ride into town on a white horse and do it all by himself. It isn't going to happen. If we are going to take maximum advantage of the opportunity we have to re-introduce the message of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Church onto the world, it is going to have to be a lot of bottom up exercises that draws inspiration from some of the new energies of the talk. But where the real work is done at the grass roots, we are all going to have become engaged in it. I congratulate you on coming together today and having the conversation on how to do that.

I want to leave you now with three thoughts:

- 1) A voice from North America to the community in Northern Ireland, thank you for who you are and what you do.
- 2) A voice from inside the Catholic fold of Down and Connor, treasure Bishop Treanor, we need him for many years to come.
- 3) As fellow witnesses to the Francis revolution, my final words to you are - Viva El Papa!