
Papa Francesco. Fr. Cantalamessa: “He teaches us to rearrange our agenda”

“The Holy Father offers us a role model to 'rearrange' our agenda, that is, to be prepared to adapt to situations and ultimately to the will of God.” Father **Raniero Cantalamessa**, preacher to the Papal Household, thus described to SIR the seventh anniversary of Francis' pontificate. "He's not devising anything just for the benefit of TV cameras: that's how Bergoglio really is!", were the first words spoken by the religious immediately after the election to the Petrine ministry. Those words resound still today as prominent features of a way of life, seven years later. The comprehension of his reform efforts, according to Cantalamessa, requires the courage to break away from stereotypes. **Francis' seventh year of pontificate begins with a special Lent, in the light of the current health emergency. The Pope's decision to “rearrange” his agenda marked by a vision based on sharing ...** We were preparing to celebrate with joy the seventh anniversary of our Pope's election. March 13 was to be a festive day in the Vatican and a holiday for employees, including the preacher to the Papal Household, who was given special exemption from delivering the traditional Lenten sermon. It still is a holiday, but of an unexpected kind.

The Holy Father sets the example to "reshuffle" our agenda, that is, to be prepared to adapt to situations and ultimately to the will of God.

The lack of public celebrations will be an additional incentive for us to join the Holy Father in giving thanks to God for the many positive things accomplished in these seven years and for the many ordeals overcome with God's grace. **At the end of January, the Holy Father began a new cycle of catecheses on the Beatitudes, understood as the "identity card" of the Christian believer. In these difficult times, how can we recover a sense of joy, which is one of the key words of this pontificate?** In his apostolic exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis presented the Beatitudes as the identity card of Christian believers. The emphasis on the close relationship between holiness and happiness is one of the points where the Holy Father's exhortation and catechesis bring a breath of fresh air to the discourse on Christian holiness.

Pope Francis succeeded in "de-clericalizing" both the word holiness and the word blessed.

In the language of Jesus, "blessed" (*makarios*) does not indicate the step before canonization and the title of saint; it simply means happy. Yet it represents a different kind happiness from the one celebrated by Beethoven in the hymn to Joy. The latter is a selective joy reserved to those who "have had a good marriage and are aware of the pleasure of drinking a glass of wine in the company of friends"; whereas this is a joy open to all, especially to the poor, the afflicted, the hungry, the derelict and the miserable. We must be grateful to the Holy Father because with his insistence on joy he helps preserve the living certainty of faith in the Christian community. Christian joy has eternity as its horizon, but it starts in this life. Not only spiritual joy, but every honest pleasure, even that which man and woman experience in mutual gift, in generating life and in seeing their children or grandchildren grow up, the pleasure of art and creativity, of beauty, the joy of friendship, of work happily completed, of contemplation of creation. These are all things that Pope Francis never tires of reminding everyone with his words and gestures. **There is a key word in the pontificate - reform - which is normally interpreted by observers only in terms of the reform of the internal structures of the Roman Curia. But there is another type of "reform" recurring in Francis' pontificate, that of the hearts: why is it so rarely mentioned?** Those who are learned in Bergoglio's life, before becoming Pope Francis, are not surprised by the role that the word "reform" holds in his pontificate. It permeated his

whole life, as religious superior, as bishop and now as pope. *We must make an effort to break away from the stereotypes we are accustomed to associating with this word. In the history of the Church, it has almost always referred to the reform of the structures and of the Roman Curia: in any case, to the reform of others. Pope Francis understands it primarily as a reform that starts from oneself and as a reform that originates from within to change the exterior, not the other way around.* Those acquainted with the "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius of Loyola discover at almost every step the influence of the Founder's method in the son who became pope. **Seven years is a biblically significant time to make assessments. Can we venture a "synthesis" of these first seven years of pontificate?** I was entrusted with one of the two exhortations that the cardinals must listen to before entering the conclave. I have a vivid memory of Cardinal Bergoglio sitting in the last row of the Synod Hall. No one, much less him, could have imagined that that self-effacing man would soon become Pope. When I saw him, on television, appearing out of St. Peter's balcony, extending his "Good evening!" to the faithful and asking to be blessed by the people, having preached the exercises twice to his clergy (the last time was the previous year) and knowing him, I said to those around me: *"He's not devising anything just for the benefit of TV cameras: that's how Bergoglio really is!"* Since then, and for the past seven years, my esteem (and with it my gratitude to God) has grown immensely. In my speech at the conclave I stressed, among other things, the need to give new impetus to collegiality and ecumenism. There was no need: Cardinal Bergoglio had long since surpassed my expectations, in ideas and practice. When, a few days later, I met with one of the cardinal electors, visibly pleased with the outcome of the conclave, he asked me: "Did we do a good job? Yes, I replied. A very good job, you and the Holy Spirit!"

M.Michela Nicolais