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Editorial

The month of March reminds us of the conclave last year that elected a new Pope. His meteoric rise from a hitherto lesser known Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires to a popularly accepted and much loved Pope Francis, has been phenomenal. His humility has made the Church proud. As many have described him to be a breath of fresh air, with no malice intended towards his worthy and greatly appreciated predecessors, he has initiated so many novelties. In his words and his actions that speak louder than his words there has been a healthy coherence, winning the admiration of the Catholic clergy and the faithful, people of other faiths, atheists and agnostics, journalists and intellectuals, the marginalized groups, and literally people from all walks of life. We have had people commenting and giving their reflections and analysis of his one year as Pope on so many TV and other News channels. I give you just one sample in the Newsletter, with a hope that you will perhaps access more from the other available sources.

Last week Pope Francis and his aides from the Vatican curia attended a Lenten retreat. What made it a highlight is perhaps the breaking of a long-standing tradition of having the retreat within the walls of the Vatican. The crowd gathered at the Sunday Angelus was delighted to see the Pope board a bus and depart along with the others for his retreat at the Pauline Fathers' retreat and conference center in Ariccia, a little away from the city of Rome. Pope Francis has truly sprung surprises. There has never been a dearth for them. I know I will not be wrong if I say, everything the Pope says and does have a touch of the newness of the Spirit...

Fr. Melwin Pinto, SJ

1. Pope Francis spends first anniversary in prayer



Thursday, March 13, marked the first anniversary of the election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina as Pope Francis. The supreme pontiff spent the day on retreat to mark Lent.

He is the first ever Pope from Latin America or as he himself jokingly remarked coming almost from “the end of the world.” The new Pope is also the first Jesuit Pope and the first to take the name of Francis. Over the past year, Pope Francis has won admiration and support far and wide thanks to his warmth and his obvious empathy with the poor and marginalized and he was named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year in 2013.

To commemorate this first anniversary, the director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., gave an interview with Vatican Radio in which he reflects on this year and its “great impulse to a journeying Church”.

“The most important aspect of this first year is without doubt the great attention, the great attraction of the people – I say the people, meaning not only practising Catholics, but everyone in this world – the great attention for this Pope, for his message. It is something that I think and hope is very deeply rooted in the heart of the people, who have felt touched by a word of love, attention, mercy, closeness, proximity, in which through the man, the Pope, the love of God arrives”.



“The Church truly seems to be a journeying people. This is her most characteristic aspect: a sense of great dynamism. The Pope has given a great impulse and journeys with a Church that seeks God's will, that seeks her mission in today's world for the good of all, truly going out to the peripheries, to the ends of the world”, he continues, adding that there are “manifestations of attention, therefore, that come from places, from atypical organs of the press”, that “mean that his message reaches its target”.



In a post on the social media on Thursday, on the occasion of the first anniversary of his Pontificate, Pope Francis asked all to pray for him. The Pontiff wrote on his Twitter account @pontifex: “Please pray for me.” This is probably the shortest tweet he published on his twitter handle. Pope Francis has always asked people to pray for him, and it has become his typical style to end his meetings or audiences always with a request to pray for him. The Pope has now close to 11 million followers on his Twitter account @Pontifex. And the re-tweeting of Pope’s message

is reported to be reaching at least 60 million people. The Pope’s English-language handle alone has over 3 million followers. The papal tweets are published in nine languages on the micro-blogging website.



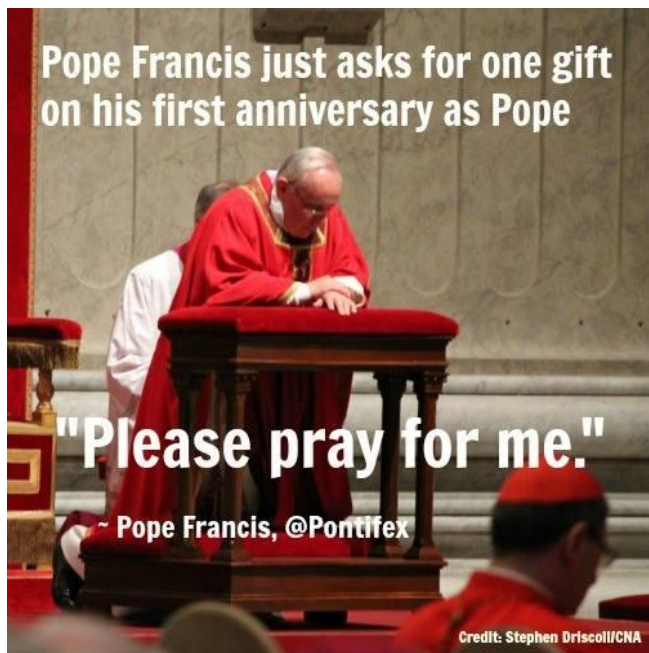
One of the world’s best-known commentators and authors on the Papacy is John Allen (*Pictured below*) who is Associate Editor of the Boston Globe newspaper specializing in the Vatican and the Catholic Church. Susy Hodges of the Vatican Radio (*pictured left*) spoke to him about the Pope's first year.

Asked what he believes is the most significant aspect of Pope Francis’ first year in office, Allen says he believes “the most significant point is that he’s accomplished

far more than most of us could have reasonably expected ... both in terms of style and in terms of sustenance.” “He’s invigorated the Church at the grass roots level” but as Allen goes on to point out, Pope Francis has also notched up some more concrete achievements. He says these include the Pope’s “deep structural reforms such as his most recent decision to create a new Secretariat for the Economy in the Vatican to impose fiscal discipline.



But could there be too many unrealistic expectations surrounding Pope Francis and what reforms he is planning? Allen agrees that in some quarters there are “over-heated” and unrealistic expectations, especially concerning doctrinal issues. “If there is an expectation that Pope Francis will radically change the doctrine of the Catholic Church, it is destined to be disappointed.”



Allen goes on to say that in his view “the fundamental change” that is occurring during Francis’ papacy is that he’s reviving “the pastoral instinct.” “I think the cornerstone of that is that this is the Pope of mercy, a Pope who profoundly believes that mercy is the most important message that the world needs to hear from the Catholic Church at this time.”

As for the most surprising aspect of Pope Francis’ papacy, Allen says that for him as a long-time Vatican correspondent, it’s “the media’s love affair with this Pope.” He describes the “Pope’s “ability to win over the hearts and minds of the media business as nothing short of astonishing.”

Asked whether he believes Pope Francis has irrevocably changed the papacy, Allen is in no doubt about that, due to “many of the structural reforms” the Pope is promoting that are “intended to make the exercise of the papacy more collegial... to make the Vatican more transparent and accountable.... and to promote a new style of leadership.” Because so many of these reforms are already “institutionalized”, Allen believes Pope Francis “has fundamentally altered the way the powers of the papacy are exercised, not the content of that power, but the way it is exercised.”

2. Pope on Lenten retreat outside Rome

Pope Francis was in the hillside town of Ariccia just south of Rome for a week-long Lenten retreat with members of the Curia. The Pope left the Vatican Sunday March 9, afternoon by bus – just a few hours after reciting the Angelus prayer with the faithful in St. Peter’s square and returned to the Vatican on Friday, March 14. [\(Video\)](#)



Breaking from a long-held tradition of holding them in the Vatican, Pope Francis decided to organize this year’s annual retreat at the Pauline Fathers’ retreat and conference center in Ariccia. The small medieval town is not far from the papal summer residence of Castel Gandolfo. And, in choosing to get away

from the Vatican and the daily pressures of curia work and duties, Pope Francis is telling us silence and prayer can have a transforming power in one’s life and relationships with others.

In an interview last week in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Pope Francis said annual retreats should be given more importance and “everyone has a right to spend five days in silence and meditation.” And, speaking to a group of spiritual directors in audience in the Vatican, the Pope said those who go on an “authentic” retreat “experience the attraction and fascination of God and return renewed and transfigured in their daily lives, their ministry and their relationships.”

Msgr. Angelo De Donatis, pastor of a parish in the center of Rome, preached for the Pope and curia officials. A respected spiritual director of priests and seminarians, Msgr De Donatis reflected on the theme of “the purification of the heart” in his meditations throughout the week.



The Pauline Fathers' complex in Ariccia, House of the Divine Master, is nestled in the forests of the hills overlooking Lake Albano. It boasts 124 rooms and five chapels, a large dining area, gardens and meeting rooms. The Pope and senior officials undoubtedly enjoyed the brisk but sunny weather during the retreat week, also by following the outdoor Way of the Cross and Rosary trails set out through the woods for quiet meditation and prayer.

But just what did the Pope do every day? He and his top aides begin their day with Mass, breakfast and a meditation by Msgr De Donatis. Then, there was lunch and free time before another meditation at 4 p.m. That’s followed by vespers, Eucharistic adoration and dinner.

At the conclusion of the exercises, the Pope expressed his gratitude to Msgr. De Donatis for his help, accompaniment and listening.

“We now return home with a good seed: the seed of the Word of God,” he said. “The Lord will send rain and that seed will grow. It will grow and it will bear fruit. We thank the Lord for the seed and for the rain that he will send us, but we also want to thank the sower because you were the sower and you know how to do it.”

“And I ask you to continue to pray for this 'syndicate of believers',” he said. “We are all sinners but we all have the will to follow Jesus more closely, without losing hope in the promise and also without losing a sense of humour.” [\(Video\)](#)



3. A typical day in the life of Pope Francis



The image of Francis sat in the fourth row among cardinals and bishops of the Roman Curia, joining them in the annual Lenten spiritual exercises, in Ariccia (Italy), is highly emblematic of the first year of his pontificate. Refusing a throne in order to go and sit in the back rows and be a living example of how authority is service is nothing new for Francis. In 1992, the then archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, appointed the taciturn Jesuit priest - who was happy to spend hours and hours confessing people - Auxiliary Bishop. “I always know where my auxiliary, Bergoglio, is. In the back row...” the cardinal said. Even when he became archbishop and cardinal and during his frequent visits to the villas miserias, the slums of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio would always sit in the back rows. This is why it was so easy for him to renounce certain age-long symbols typical of imperial customs which the papacy had inherited. His way of doing things, his style, which is filled with substance, has brought him close to and made him accessible to people.

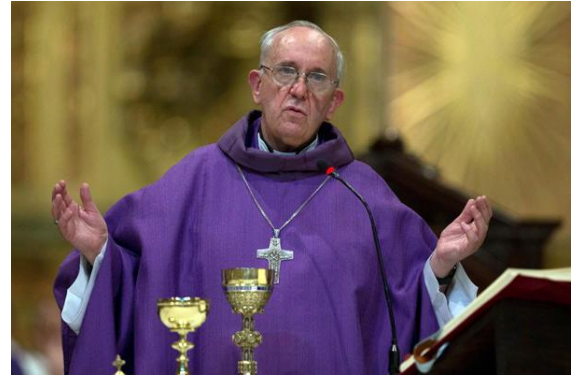
The light in suite no. 201 in St. Martha’s House, furnished with heavy walnut furniture, comes on very early in the morning, around at 4:30 am. For two hours, Francis sits alone, praying and meditating the Readings of the day and preparing the brief homilies he gives off-the-cuff every morning, as his Maltese secretary Alfred Xuereb explains. A minute or so before 7 am the Pope goes down to the sacristy alone, where there are fifty or so people, some priests and his two secretaries, Xuereb and Fabian Pedacchio (an Argentinean) waiting for him. Since January, each day the faithful attending the morning mass



come from a different Roman parish: the Bishop of



Rome, Bergoglio, knows he is unable to visit all the parishes (even Wojtyla didn't and he was Pope for 27 years), so instead, he invites them, so to speak, to his home. The homilies said at these masses are one of the most important new elements of this pontificate: they are simple, to the point and yet profound at the same time. There is no official written text but Vatican radio publishes a summary of each homily in the late morning. The Vatican publishing house has also published a two-volume work titled "Omellie del mattino", containing the Pope's daily morning homilies.



When mass has ended the Pope takes off his vestments and goes back to the chapel where he sits at the back and prays in silence for a minute or so. He then goes out into the atrium to greet people one by one. He takes his breakfast at 8 am in the St. Martha's House dining room. This is where the Pope usually has lunch at 1 pm and dinner at 8 pm. In the evening there is only table service for the residence's guests during the first course. After this, each of Francis' dining companions, including himself, gets up and chooses their second course from the self-service area." I need to live among people and if I lived on my own, perhaps a little isolated, it wouldn't do me good," Francis said when



he explained that he chose not to live in the Apostolic Palace for "psychiatric reasons", because he can't "live alone", isolated in the papal apartment with its funnel-shaped entrance and too many guards. His decision to live in St. Martha's House dismantled the old "court"-like structure within the space of a few months.

The Pope's days are intense. A part from the audiences he holds, the official meetings and the visits from heads of state, the piles of documents he receives from the Secretariat of State and the Curia congregations and the reports he gets from the commissions of inquiry into the IOR and the Vatican

economy, Francis finds the time to personally read about fifty or so letters and messages from the thousands he receives every day. These sit on his desk for a while and the Pope then responds to them personally without any intermediaries, using the landline.

The personal secretaries' role has also changed under Francis' pontificate: they no longer accompany the Pope during the audiences or on his travels (the papal butler, Sandro Mariotti, known as "Sandrone" now carries out some of the personal secretaries' tasks on these occasions). They practically have become "invisible". The only previous case of this happening was when Pius XII was Pope: he had some Jesuit personal secretaries who stayed in the background. In the first few weeks of his pontificate Francis confided to his pupil and friend Jorge Milia that he didn't want secretaries or other colleagues managing his agenda and deciding who he could and couldn't meet. And indeed now, he decides and organises many of his meetings himself.



Those around him are struck by his “determination”, as Xuereb, his personal secretary told Vatican Radio: “He works relentlessly. When he feels the need to have break he doesn’t just close his eyes and do nothing, he sits and prays the Rosary. I think he prays at least three Rosaries a day. “This helps me unwind” he told me. Then he sets to work again.”

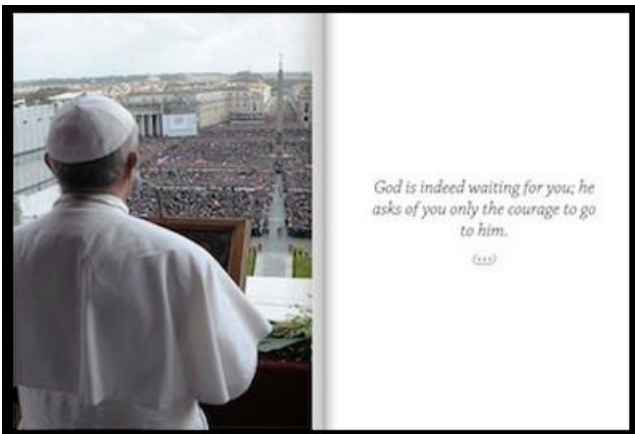
Francis pays special attention to his meetings with the sick and suffering. He spends hours embracing people at the Wednesday Audiences in St. Peter’s Square. “This is because he recognises the body of Christ in their suffering,” Xuereb underlines. These embraces make him forget about his own misfortunes. “In the first months of his pontificate he was in a great deal of pain because of his sciatica. Doctors advised him to avoid bending over but when he met sick people in wheel chairs or sick children in their buggies he bend down anyway to show his closeness to them,” the Pope’s secretary says.



A year on from that moment when Pope Francis made his first appearance on the central loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica, when he pronounced the words “Dear brothers and sisters, good evening!” not everyone has got used to seeing the Pope getting around on foot, carrying his own bag, using an economy car and seeking contact with people, forgetting about security. He is certainly challenging established customs and that mindset “of princes” which the Argentinean Pope is asking the Church to rid itself of.

Source: Vatican Insider

4. Vatican celebrates papal anniversary with free online book



In honor of the one year anniversary of Pope Francis’ election as Bishop of Rome, the Vatican website has published a special online book, compiled of various phrases he has spoken throughout the year. Entitled “Do we want to be holy? Yes or no?” the online publication can be found on the Vatican’s official website by clicking on one’s language of choice, after which a pop-up window appears with the book’s cover and title. **OR just** [\(Click here for online book\)](#)

Beginning with the Pope’s familiar plea for the faithful not to be “men and women of sadness” because “a Christian can never be sad,” the virtual memoir offers short quotes by Pope Francis taken from his homilies, speeches and addresses given throughout the year. Below each quote is a link to the exact text from which it has been extracted, and each phrase is accompanied by a picture of him on the adjacent page, courtesy, Vatican daily news source L’Osservatore Romano.

The book commemorates the pontiff’s election as Bishop of Rome on March 13 of last year, on which his opening words as Pope during his first Urbi et Orbi blessing already foreshadowed the unique tone that has



defined much of his impactful first year as head of the Catholic Church. During the speech, he observed how “it was the duty of the Conclave to give Rome a Bishop,” and that “It seems that my brother Cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one...” “But here we are...I thank you for your welcome,” the newly-elected pontiff expressed, adding that “The diocesan community of Rome now has its Bishop. Thank you!”

Offering his first moment of prayer for retired pontiff Benedict XVI, Pope Francis led his new flock in the traditional prayers of the blessing, consisting of an Our Father, Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

Afterwards, he explained to the thousands gathered below in St. Peter’s Square that “now, we take up this journey: Bishop and People,” noting that it is a “journey of the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.”



...trust in the Lord: this is the key to success in life.

(222)

“A journey of fraternity, of love, of trust among us. Let us always pray for one another. Let us pray for the whole world, that there may be a great spirit of fraternity.” Pausing for a moment before giving his official first blessing as Bishop of Rome to the Church and to the world, Pope Francis asked for a special “favor” which has become a common request and a unique trait of his pontificate.

5. Pope Francis to visit South Korea



It’s official: Pope Francis is going to South Korea. A statement from the Press Office of the Holy See on Monday, March 10, confirmed that the Holy Father will be travelling to the Republic of Korea from August 14th to August 18th.

“Welcoming the invitation from the President of the Republic and the Korean bishops,” the statement reads, “His Holiness Pope Francis will make an Apostolic Voyage to the Republic of Korea from 14 to 18 August 2014, on the occasion of the Sixth Asian Youth Day, to be held in the diocese of Daejeon.” No further details of the trip

were immediately available, though the Holy Father has received invitations from, and spoken of his desire to visit a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Sri Lanka. [\(Video\)](#)

For the event, which involves the entire nation, the Church is receiving full support from the Korean government has created a Committee for the Pope's visit, which is cooperating and assisting the ecclesial Commission in

many ways. South Korean President Park Geun-hye met with South Korean Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung at the presidential office Cheongwadae in Seoul, South Korea on March 14.

The two main events of the trip concern: the organization of the Asian Youth Day, as reported to Fides by the Korean Church. The Day, to be held in Dajeon from 10 to 17 August 2014 will welcome young people representing 29 countries in Asia. The second memorable event is the celebration for the beatification of the Korean Martyrs, another event that deeply touched the hearts of the Korean population. When Pope John Paul II arrived in Korea in 1984 and in 1989, "we had over a year to prepare for the visit. Now we have less than five months. But we are working with zeal and enthusiasm", says to Fides News Agency, the preparatory Commission of the Korean Church.



6. Pope urges priests to have hearts of mercy and compassion

Good priests must be close to their people, sharing their suffering and healing their wounds. That was Pope Francis' message to priests from the Rome diocese who met with their bishop in the Paul VI audience hall on Thursday, March 6. The Pope focused his words on the theme of God's infinite mercy, saying a priest can only share this gift with others if he feels it in his own heart first. [\(Video as in story number 12\)](#)



Pope Francis began his reflection by commenting on the reading from St Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is moved with compassion as he sees people 'distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd'. In the same way, he said, priests here in Rome and around the world see so many people suffering in difficult situations and their hearts too must be filled with compassion.

Describing this period in the life of the Church as a time of God's mercy, Pope Francis said **priests must be men of mercy, experiencing that 'gut reaction' of compassion as they welcome, listen, advise and absolve those seeking healing and forgiveness.** They can only do this effectively, he went on, if they allow themselves to be wrapped in God's embrace through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Reiterating the image of the Church as a field hospital, the Pope said mercy means first and foremost being close to people and healing their wounds. Priests who are detached from reality, he stressed, do not help the Church and he asked his listeners how well they know the wounds of their own parishioners. Mercy, the Pope continued, means not being either too lenient or too strict with people who come to Confession. Rather it means being like the Good Samaritan who takes care of the individual, listening, respecting and accompanying people on their journey of healing and Reconciliation.

Finally **Pope Francis asked the priests of his diocese if they still cry with their people? If they pray and struggle with God on behalf of their people? If they turn to God or to the TV at the end of their day?** If they are able to embrace the elderly, the sick, the children, with hearts that are open and moved to compassion? Only those who are not ashamed to touch the wounded flesh of those on the margins of society, he said, will one day be admitted to God's kingdom to gaze on the glorified flesh of Christ.

7. Pope calls Religious Orders to ‘Transparent Administration’

Pope Francis sent a message on Saturday, March 8, to the participants of a Vatican-organized Symposium on "The management of the ecclesiastical goods of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for the service of humanity and for the mission of the Church." The two-day event, which was organized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, at the request of Pope Francis, took place at the Pontifical University Antonianum.



In his message addressed to Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pope Francis recognized that ‘our time is characterized by significant changes and progress in many areas. However, citing his own apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the Pope writes: "Today, everything comes into play in competitiveness and survival of the fittest, where the strong eat the weak". As a Christian community we feel challenged in the face of uncertainty in which most of the men and women of our time live, observed the Pope.

Pope Francis exhorted the members saying that ‘Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life can and should be protagonists and active in the life and witness that the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift find their place in economic activity.’ The fidelity to the founding charism and the spiritual heritage, together with the true purpose of each institute, remain the first criterion of evaluation of the administration, and management, said the Pope adding "the nature of charisma directs energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all towards the one mission".

The Pope exhorted them ‘to ensure that the goods of the Institutes are administered with caution and transparency’, not to waste and is attentive to the proper use of resources. In his message Pope Francis also recalled the words of Servant of God Paul VI who called for "a new and authentic Christian mentality" and a "new style of life of the Church".

I wanted to draw such a need in the Message for Lent this year, said the Pope adding, ‘Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are always prophetic voice and witness the vibrant novelty which is Christ, conformed to him who became poor enriching us with his poverty.’ This poverty is loving solidarity, sharing and charity and is expressed in sobriety, in the pursuit of justice and warning to the idols of materialism that obscure the true meaning of life.



You do not need a theoretical poverty, said the Pope, but poverty is that you learn by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, the poor, the sick, and the children. Pope Francis concluded his message inviting the participants to follow the ‘logic of the Gospel which teaches us to trust in the Providence of God’.

8. Papal gardens of Castel Gandolfo now open to public

Known as the Barberini Gardens, the historic area of Castel Gandolfo has been declared open to the general public by Pope Francis, with tours available for those who are interested.



Located roughly 20 miles south of Rome in the Alban Hills, the gardens surround the Papal Summer Residence at Castel Gandolfo and include the remnants of a Roman Villa, a 62 acre farm, and the ancient papal palace. According to a March 4 article published on Vatican Radio, director of the Vatican Museums Antonio Paolucci explained that it was the Pope himself who made the decision to open the gardens of the Pontifical Villa, “where the splendor of art and the glory of nature co-exist in admirable equilibrium.”

Having officially opened on March 1, the gardens lay on an ancient Villa built by Emperor Domitian, who was both the third and last ruler during the Flavian dynasty. With a view overlooking Lake Albano and beyond, as well as the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, visitors are now free to stroll throughout the ruins of the imperial theater and covered passageway where the emperor himself and his guests would walk when trying to escape from the heat.

A favorite summer getaway for Benedict XVI during his pontificate, the villa was conceded to the Holy See as one of their extra-terrestrial possessions under the Lateran pact of 1929. Following major restoration efforts, the Villa has served as the Papal summer residence since the pontificate of Urban VIII during the 17th century, and has a small farm created by Pope Pius XI, which produces eggs, milk, oil, vegetables and honey either for local employees, or for sale in the Vatican supermarket.

Among the other secret treasures the gardens hold, visitors can also enjoy a magnolia garden, a path of roses as well as one of aromatic herbs and one of lilies, a square of holly oaks and the breathtaking Belvedere garden, from which there is a panoramic view over Latium, out to the coastline. Pope Pius XII, who offered war refugees sanctuary in the Villa, died there in 1958, as did Pope Paul VI two decades later.



The gardens are open to the public in the mornings from Monday through Saturday, with bookings available for either individuals or groups on the Vatican Museums website. Individual tickets cost 26 euros, while group costs vary, with a beginning rate of 450 euro for a group of 1-15 people.

(CNA/EWTN Report)

9. Argentine silversmith speaks of chalice he is crafting for his friend, the Pope

An Argentine silversmith in Buenos Aires who is a long-standing friend of Pope Francis is making the finishing touches on a special hand-crafted chalice for the Pope. The two men have known each other for over a decade, dined together many times when Cardinal Bergoglio was the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and often ran into each other when getting their hair cut at a barber shop in the neighbourhood where they both lived. [\(Video\)](#)



Aged 71, Pallarols is a world-renowned silversmith who has crafted pieces for a long line of celebrities including Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, Frank Sinatra and Sharon Stone. Pallarols' planned gift for the Pope is a truly global collaboration. In an interview he told Vatican Radio he travelled around and got hundreds of thousands of people from 17 different countries to hammer more than 10 billion chisel marks onto the silver chalice he hopes to bring to Rome this spring to formally present to Pope Francis.

Pallarols said he visited Italy in 2005 and described a meal he had with Cardinal Bergoglio at a restaurant in Rome's historic centre. The Argentine Cardinal was in Rome to take part in the conclave and subsequent installation mass for Pope Benedict following the death of Blessed John Paul II. Pallarols also said that as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio had presided over the wedding mass for his son. *(Photo shows Juan Carlos Pallarols dining with the then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio at a Rome restaurant in 2005.)*



When asked to describe the personality of Jorge Bergoglio, Pallarols said he was "a very special person." He was "very humble", a person who didn't speak a lot but was a very good listener. He said the Cardinal was always trying to provide help to people in the poor neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, especially young people who had no money or job or who suffered from drug addictions. **"When he was archbishop here, dignitaries would come to visit him and give him gifts. If they were made of gold or silver, Bergoglio would quietly bring them to me afterwards to melt them down. He told me to sell the metal and pass the money to the priests working in the shanty towns. He insisted that I hand over the money. He didn't want anyone knowing it had really come from him."**



10. Pope defends 'slum priests'

Marking his first anniversary as pontiff on Thursday March 13, Pope Francis defended 'slum priests' from the accusation their advocacy for the downtrodden reflects a different, leftist ideology away from the Church. "The work of the priests in the slums of Buenos Aires is not ideological, it's apostolic, and therefore forms part of the same Church," Pope Francis insisted in an interview made public on Thursday. Community radio station FM Bajo Flores, that broadcasts from the Villa 1-11-14 slum across from the San Lorenzo soccer stadium, where the Pope's favourite team plays, interviewed the Pope two weeks earlier in the Vatican. The interview was aired for the first time in public on Thursday on a huge screen before a crowd gathering inside the slum's gymnasium.



Pope Francis said, "Those who think that it's another church don't understand how they work in the slums. The important thing is the work." As Argentina's top Roman Catholic leader before he was elected pope, Jorge Mario



Bergoglio assigned many priests to parishes in the crowded slums that grew up around the capital. His support made him a cherished figure among the very poor who felt marginalized, especially during the bloody 1960s and '70s, when military dictatorships ruled the South American country. Pope Francis was asked about Padre Carlos Mugica and other members of Argentina's Movement of Third World Priests, a branch of liberation theology, which the Vatican tried to stamp out for years. Mugica was labeled a communist subversive by the right, but he also spoke out against armed revolution before he was murdered in 1974. "They were not communists. They were great priests who fought for life," insisted the pope, who has

sought to rehabilitate church views of liberation theology, a Latin American-inspired approach in which priests advocate for the poor. When asked by FM Bajo Flores radio why he has said that so often since the night of his election a year ago when he stepped onto the balcony at St. Peter's and asked for the crowd's blessing. "Because I need it," he answered. "What I need most is that the people of God support me."



The interview was warmly received. Agustina Mendoza, who has lived nearly half her 63 years in the slum, said Bergoglio used to sit in her house, sharing herbal mate tea and eating "sopa Paraguaya," a hearty kind of cornbread. "I know he remembers my 'sopa Paraguaya.' His simplicity really stuck with me," she said. "He used to be so serious. He never smiled. Now he's bonded with the entire world. Francis has met all expectations," she added.

11. “So that they may be one” – theme of Pope’s Holy Land visit

“Ut Unum Sint”, the Latin for “So that they may be one,” is the theme that Pope Francis has chosen for his 3-day pastoral visit to the Holy Land this May. The Vatican on Friday, March 14, released the theme along with the logo depicting Christ and a disciple in a boat.



On first announcing the Holy Land trip on Jan 5th, Pope Francis had explained that the May 24-26 visit to Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem will be to commemorate 50 years of the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and the spiritual head of the world’s Orthodox Christians, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, which took place on Jan. 5, 1964, in Jerusalem. Pope Francis said that his visit would include an Ecumenical Meeting at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with the representatives of the Christian Churches of Jerusalem, along with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the spiritual head of Orthodox Christians worldwide. After over 9 centuries of mutual hostility, excommunication and isolation between Catholics and Orthodox, relations began to warm up after the 1964 meeting.

12. Pope Francis reveals 'mercy' theft

Pope Francis confessed Thursday March 8, that he took the rosary cross of his late confessor from his casket and wears it to this day in a fabric pouch under his cassock. He said he did so telling the late priest, "Give me half your mercy." [\(Video as in story number 6\)](#)



Francis made the revelation Thursday March 8, during an informal chat with Roman priests about the need to be merciful to their flocks. He told the story of the "great confessor" of Buenos Aires who had heard confessions from most of the diocesan priests as well as from Pope John Paul II when he visited Argentina.

When the priest died, Francis went to pray by his open casket and was stunned that no one had brought any flowers. "This man forgave the sins of all the priests of Buenos Aires, but not a single flower ...?" Francis recalled. So he went out and bought a bouquet of roses, and when he returned to arrange them around the casket, he saw the rosary the priest still held in his hand. "And immediately there came to mind the thief we all have inside ourselves and while I arranged the flowers I took the cross and with just a bit of force I removed it," he said, showing with his hands how he pulled the cross off the rosary. "And in that moment I looked at him and I said **'Give me half your mercy.'**"

Francis said he kept the cross in his shirt pocket for years, but that the cassock he wears now as pope doesn't have a pocket. He now keeps it in a little pouch underneath. **"And whenever a bad thought comes to mind about someone, my hand goes here, always,"** he said, gesturing to his heart. "And I feel the grace, and that makes me feel better."

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