

We all probably recollect the day on March 13th earlier this year when we received a new Pope. I was in Caldwell Hall when I heard the bells ring and saw the excitable multitude of people erupt upon the news of white smoke rising from the Vatican. I was pulled into one of the suspended classes that had turned on the news coverage. When the new pope appeared before the crowds for the first time, many in the class were surprised, not being sure who it was, but only knowing it was a man who would go by Pope Francis. Since then though, we have learned a lot about him and have been touched by what he has done and said. It is the first time for me and many of us in our lives where we are old enough to understand and pay attention to the Pope and his activities, specifically at the start of his papacy. So we can ask ourselves of the way in which Pope Francis has reached us? Many of us have probably heard or read a recent interview with Pope Francis in the *America* magazine. It is a wonderful article that offers an enlightening encounter with Pope Francis. By learning and understanding more of Pope Francis, we ourselves may find strength and hope in his witness and example.

The article is called “A Big Heart Open to God” and throughout the entirety of the article, this message is woven. It is first perceived when Jorge Mario Bergoglio is asked who he is. He relates how he feels to a painting, “The Calling of St. Matthew”, by the Italian artist Caravaggio. In it, Jesus looks to St. Matthew and points to him, and St. Matthew looks somewhat bewildered. Pope Francis says he feels like St. Matthew in that “I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” Many of us may have a similar thought of how we feel the Lord has called us. Upon election of Pope, Cardinal Bergoglio accepted by saying “I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance.” Relying and trusting in the Lord is central to him, most notably in the aspect of discernment. He says how this “looking deep into myself” with the guiding aid of the Lord correlates to his choices, even to such seemingly small decisions as to the use of a non-luxurious car, for example. He further says that this discernment is “always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor.” We ourselves can think about how much time we spend thinking of how we will use our time, and the decisions we will make. We may see that the bad decisions we make are related to the lack of time taken to truly sit down and think about its effects on others, ourselves and God. This is indeed hard to do with pressures, schoolwork, and jobs trying to grasp our time. To Pope Francis though, “taking the necessary time” is rewarded because “it helps us find the most appropriate means.”

One of the most notable aspects of the article was the way in which Pope Francis sees the church. He relates the church to that of a “field hospital after battle” where the wounds are healed and the people’s hearts are warmed. He dreams “of a church that is a mother and shepherdess” whose ministers and faithful can accompany people wherever they go and also accompany those “that [have] a flair for finding new paths.” And above all, the first message that needs to be proclaimed is that “Jesus Christ has saved you.” Pope Francis proclaims that the message “of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives.” This is the heart of the message of Jesus, and the Pope states that sometimes it seems that the moral issues of today come before this. Doctrines and church rules can become the pastoral ministry, dangerously delegating God’s love to the second tier. But it is rather the teaching, or the

catechesis that comes after the central message. In our lives here, this is what we must remember and do. We all struggle with aspects of sin. Pope Francis is saying that helping people in their lives cannot be met by telling them what they have done wrong or condemning them. God's love and mercy comes first. Pope Francis reminds us that "God is greater than sin" and simply it is not through moral issues or rules that one must be met but with the love that we have been asked to declare.

The article certainly mentions a lot more than I have said here and now. But after reading it, one comes out with a much better understanding of Pope Francis. It helps to relate to him more and to see where he comes from. His witness can help in reaffirming our witness and lead us along the path we have been called to travel with God.