

INTRODUCTION



“I cannot live my life without other people.”

Shortly after his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis granted an interview to a number of Jesuit publications. In it, Catholics all over the world were introduced to the deep spirituality and humanity of this man.

When asked why he was living in the modest quarters he had inhabited during the conclave, he pointed out that, while the papal apartments were lovely, they also served to cut him off from others, something this formerly subway-riding, bus-hopping priest was not used to.

Unity—communion with others, and unity of all believers—has been a constant theme of his ever since. Here are thirty days of reflections and prayers on this topic, one very near and dear to Pope Francis’ heart. May his thoughts guide you as you seek to grow closer to all your companions on the journey!

1 | A SINGLE HUMAN FAMILY

We are journeying toward unity, working through our many differences through dialogue and a sense of our common nature.

Pope Francis is fond of Blessed Paul VI's closing homily from Vatican II, where he said that to the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is unwelcome. Is this a reality in our parishes, our workplaces, our cities, and our homes today? Not necessarily, and this is why Pope Francis asks us to remember that all of us are created in God's image, and all of us are family, no matter where we come from, what economic status we have, or what our ethnic or social orientation might be. When we remember this, he says, then our dialogue together becomes all the richer for our many viewpoints.

PONDER

Whom do I exclude from "my" circle?

PRAY

God of unity and love, help me to see everyone I meet as a reflection of you!

2 | ALL BELOVED CHILDREN

*There is only one real certainty:
we are all children of God.*

In today's often-broken, troubled world, it is easy to take sides, to pick a camp, to speak in terms of "us" and "them." Pope Francis urges us not to lose sight of the call and responsibility of our baptism—to see all people as brothers and sisters, to forgive without counting the cost, to be generous with what we have to those who have less. Does this fit in with most of the images the world gives us? No, but that's what makes us disciples of Christ. We reach out in hope of unity because it is what we are asked to do, not because it's fashionable. Christianity, well practiced, certainly is countercultural!

PONDER

Today, can I look at everyone I meet as a loved one?

PRAY

God of unity and love, help me to see with your eyes and to reach out in love as you do.

3 | HOLY, FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD

You can't be truly human without being part of a people. No one is saved alone. God enters into our complex web of human relationships.

Pope Francis could be echoing John Donne's "No man is an island" here, but his point is well taken. We were not created to be separate creatures, but to learn from one another, to share together, and to be part of a community. This sense of unity can only happen when we have the courage to take off our blinders and actively engage those around us. Pope Francis says that "holy, faithful people of God" is his favorite image for the church, and in his reaching out to all, he models that very well. Our task is the same.

PONDER

When was the last time I considered myself holy?

PRAY

God of unity and love, fill me with your Spirit, so that I may approach everyone with kindness and joy.

4 | ON A HOLY MISSION

*I see the sanctity of God's people,
this daily sanctity.*

Pope Francis' vision of unity is based on our holiness. We may not consider ourselves holy, and perhaps our behavior is lacking in holiness, but Pope Francis says that we are created in God's image, and God *is certainly* holy. What we need to do is change our vision, to set aside our normal, sometimes cynical view of things, and begin to believe that all of us have been created to work together for the greater glory of God. If we begin to see everything we do as part of a holy mission instead of just the day-to-day routine, our entire worldview can change!

PONDER

Can I look at each action in every day as something holy?

PRAY

God of unity and love, let me do just one thing today that is truly filled with your grace!

5 | ROOM ENOUGH FOR ALL

*Our church should not be a small chapel
for a select few, but a home for all.*

On his trip to the United States, Pope Francis went from the U.S. Capitol to a local parish to spend lunchtime with the homeless. During his first Holy Thursday as pope, he visited a prison and washed the feet of inmates, including Muslims and women. These are only two illustrations of his idea of the church not being an exclusive “nest protecting our mediocrity.” Indeed, it is our job to reach out and ensure that no one feels left out—anywhere, anyhow. When we remember that anyone’s pain hurts us all and anyone’s joy enriches us all, then we are well on the way to making a good beginning. Imagine the joy that would flood the world if we all began to celebrate one another’s gifts!

PONDER

Am I welcoming to all, or do I pick and choose?

PRAY

God of unity and love, help me to be generous, not stingy, with all of your children.