When Pope Benedict XVI suddenly stepped down 13 years ago, much like with the more recent conclave, in the days leading up to the start of the conclave, everyone was trying to guess who the new Holy Father might be. Many suspected an Italian would be named, or someone who was an adept administrator to handle some of the personnel issues that have gone on within the walls of the Vatican. Still others assumed it would be someone relatively young for a pope, in his early 60s, as Pope Benedict was in his mid-70s when elected.

Needless to say, when we all heard those well-known words “Habemus Papam,” or “We have a pope,” and the name Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was pronounced, I’m sure a lot of people first went “who could that be” and then quickly went to the internet.

As the world awaited a glimpse at the new pope, it did not take long to get some sense of why the Holy Spirit influenced the Cardinal Electors to name Cardinal Jorge as the new vicar of Christ. One could see the kindness in his face and eyes, and then so many were struck when he gave a simple and humble opening address, and, as his first act, before blessing the crowds, bowed before all in Saint Peter’s Square and asked for a blessing

from them. He also refused to wear a gold cross with jewels and kept a simple wooden cross around his neck that he had as a bishop and opted not for the traditional red shoes but his simple black shoes. The following day, he showed up in person to pay his own hotel bill (presumably telling the person at the desk he had checked in under another name) and turned down the papal limousine to ride in a bus with cardinals. In his first Mass as pope, he threw security for a loop by walking deep into the crowds to meet people rather than staying on the balcony. He cut his installation Mass short, and also in a break from tradition he did not want all the cardinals to come to him and profess obedience; rather only a few. He was said to still call them his brothers and did not want to sit on the papal throne. He also did not have Holy Thursday Mass at Saint Peter's or in one of the major basilicas of Rome. Instead, he would offer Mass at prisons around Rome, where he washed the feet of inmates.

This was nothing new for him. He had a long history of humility and of service to the poor.

Some first began to notice him in 2001, when he was at a Vatican conference participating with bishops from around the world. He filled in for

Cardinal Egan of New York, who flew home after the 9/11 tragedies, and his colleagues were so impressed with his speaking that they named him president of a commission writing a declaration summing up the conference, a very important position. His homily also apparently provoked applause, and people who were at this conference reportedly said many would try to get photos taken with the cardinal from Argentina as if he were a famous actor or well-known sports star. That could easily go to someone's head, but it certainly did not for Cardinal Bergoglio.

One could tell just by looking at him. He did not want the special cassock a cardinal could wear, instead staying in a simple clergyman's suit of black as opposed to red. (We saw this on the day he became pope when he rejected the cross of gold with jewels and opted for the simple wood cross, he had as a bishop and black shoes). In fact, he didn't even want new clothes bought for him, but rather his successor's clerical garb adjusted by a tailor. He became a bishop in 1992, having served as a confessor at the residence of the Jesuits in Cordoba. The Archbishop of Buenos Aires at the time, Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, selected him as one of his auxiliary bishops, and then his right-hand man as a vicar general. When his health began to fail, he asked him to become his successor, and when he did, he

quickly became well-liked among the priests of the city. He was reported to have cared deeply about their needs. He set up a direct phone line so that priests could call him at any time of day with a problem. He would also stay overnight in parishes to help when priests were sick and spent a lot of time with elderly priests.

Earlier on, it would seem that along his road to the papacy, he could have been seduced by power or prestige, and he could have played it safe to further his career. He also could have let anger and resentment taken over at how he was treated along the way before he became a bishop.

Going back to 1973, at the age of 36, a pretty young age for the job, he was made provincial Superior of the Jesuits, the head of all Jesuits in Uruguay and Argentina. There were factions that developed in the order of those who loved him and those that didn't, conservative and liberal factions. The conservatives wanted to remain focused on their inner religious life and continue in their role of educating the next generations of the wealthy elite in Argentina. The progressives wanted a more outward-facing spirituality and a shift to working with the uneducated poor in the shantytowns. However, to label then Jesuit Superior Bergoglio a

progressive would be a mistake. In fact, he cracked down on some in the Jesuits for going too far to the left; this caused him to be accused of colluding with the Right. He was accused of being an ultra-conservative. He had to deal with factions in the Jesuits, the Vatican, and a military dictatorship. He looked back on that period and realized that his faith needed perfection. In an interview he gave after becoming pope, he said “I found myself provincial when I was still very young. I was only 36 years old. That was crazy.” And so, at the age of 50, he was removed by Jesuit leaders in Rome to pray, work on his thesis, and essentially exiled to a remote town. Back home he wasn’t even allowed to say Mass in public in the Jesuit church - he could only hear confessions. He had to get permission to make phone calls. His letters were controlled. His supporters were told not to contact him. He was ostracized.

And so, in Cordoba, he turned inward rather than becoming angry. He’d hear confessions, but he spent a lot of time looking out the window and walking the streets, from the Jesuit residence to the church along a road that passed through different areas of the city. People from all walks of life visited the church for confession, and he found engaging with them to be very moving. And so rather than be embittered, he used his time in

Cordoba to reflect and to grow in his faith. In 1992, when he came back to Buenos Aires as an auxiliary bishop, he remodeled his approach to being a leader. He was delegatory and participative. He developed a habit of asking the other person to pray for him at the end of every conversation. A new man had emerged. He had had a profound conversion that reconfigured his understanding of the way God wanted him to behave. He developed a new model of leadership, one which involved listening, participation and collegiality. When he arrived at his next job, as an assistant bishop in Buenos Aires, the old Bergoglio had vanished. He had changed from an authoritarian reactionary into the figure of radical humility that he carried into his papacy.

Eventually becoming Archbishop then cardinal, as cardinal he was also entitled to a car service, but he took the bus and subway. The cardinal also had a very elegant residence that he was given, but he did not want this. Instead, he gave that to a needy religious order who used it to help the poor and stayed in a room in Buenos Aires. He was also said to be very easy to reach. Most of the time to talk to someone at the archdiocese, it's very difficult (I know, I've tried) but not only could priests reach him, so could people.

And perhaps that's very appropriate, because he cared deeply about the people he served. He was said to have made frequent stops to the shantytowns of Buenos Aires where he didn't just come for a photo-op but got to know people. He would talk to people in the slums, and one man, a bricklayer, said to him how proud he was of him, because "when I came here with my companions in a bus I saw you sitting in one of the last seats, like one ore of us. I told them it was you, but no one believed me." When he saw injustice going on, he would also act. He saw police beating a woman during financial riots in December of 2001 from his office window and phoned the Ministry of the Interior. The security secretary took his call, and Bergoglio asked him to differentiate between activists who were creating a disturbance and who were simply upset and wanted to withdraw their money from the bank. A few years later, when a number of young people died in a fire in a rock club tragedy, Bergoglio went to their aid - in the middle of the night. He got to the scene before the police and fire fighters to do what he could to help.

During his papacy he certainly made an impression with his humility and leadership style. He was said to have chosen the name when a cardinal

from Brazil embraced him after he had the most votes and said to him, “don’t forget the poor.” Of course, based on his background he wouldn’t, and so he opted for the name largely because of how Francis of Assisi helped the poor. But what is so striking to me with Francis is that while the Church has always preached on the need to help the poor, the people you associate with this are typically folks such as Mary Jo Copeland, Mother Teresa, or sometimes religious orders. The pope you typically see from the balcony or giving a speech. Francis would do that, but as we also saw he was also clearly a man of action who cares deeply about making others understand what the Gospel is all about through both words and deeds.

In the Gospel we have the first pope, who is given keys too, the keys to the kingdom of heaven. It’s the authority of Jesus given to Peter and his successors to build up the Body of Christ; to preach and teach and celebrate the sacraments. It’s an authority that has been handed down to this day, which is why bishops derive their authority from the pope and priests from their bishop. Some like Peter have used it wisely; others have certainly used it inappropriately. But the fact remains that the Church has remained, created by our Lord, and we are called to emulate our Lord as a servant leader, by using our authority wisely. How do we do that?

I think as a starting point we have prayer and formation through the Church. And this is where we are to trust the Church, because the Church - not Churches - but Church - was established by Jesus on Peter, and Peter is the one who gets it, it being the answer to the question “who do you say that I am?” It’s an odd question to ask really, who would say something like that - but the nature of who Jesus is matters, for He is our Redeemer. It’s the Church that helps us to answer that question, which is why it’s so important to trust the Church. When we realize the Church is there to guide us, hence the term “Mother” to describe Her often, we are open to learning how to understand and articulate our faith and live it out. A person who knows the faith will have the wisdom about how to be a good parent, a better priest, how to do their work better and live their lives better. No matter how old we are, we are growing as people, and we need the Church both for the sacraments and to be with our Lord through the Eucharist, but also to facilitate our growth as people. The Church certainly has had her share of problems - as Fulton Sheen reflected upon Simon Peter keeps both names; and Simon symbolizes the man who will be fickle in his faith, deny Jesus, make mistakes and indeed popes and bishops have done that; but Peter symbolizes the man who understands who Jesus really is, and

that is the Church for us - the Church helps us understand the nature of our Lord and how to truly follow Him. The Church isn't here to entertain us but to ultimately bring us closer to Jesus which is why we come here for the sacraments but to really make the faith a matter of the head and heart. Sure, the Church has had her problems - but it's interesting isn't it that in Rome the Colosseum is there but in ruins where the emperors once watched gladiators and statues in ruins of the Roman Empire are there, but the emperors aren't. The same is true with so many other powers from the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany to Napoleonic France; powers come and go, but the power of the Spirit is still there guiding our Church - so hopefully we trust her. We all know popes and bishops have misused authority - for there will always be scandal in the Church. But the Church is still here, and while the authority at times has been misused by some, the Holy Spirit guides the Church and so many have used it well. On our part we need to trust her.

Second, we need to be honest and say to ourselves how do we use the authority we are given? People are given power in a community, a place of work, or in a family. So, what do we do with it? Shebna for instance in the first reading is a problem. He is Master of the Palace, so had a lot of

authority - he too had keys, the keys to the palace, and the king trusted him, often even deferred to him. Shebna though blows it. He's more concerned with himself and making himself a nice memorial, a tomb in the rock that will make his name known forever. So, it's not about God at all; it's about him. Power can be misused and we can become a petty tyrant or also a coward. Sometimes people also use power for their own glory, taking advantage of others. We need to ask ourselves a question: are you building a monument to yourself or are you breathing life into others? We want to use authority to ultimately make one another better; such as Cardinal Begoglio reflecting in the small town in his late 30s and early 40s, we too need to reflect on how we treat our spouses, our kids, the people around us? Is it about service and helping or about our ego or getting our way? We need to always be learning on the job so to speak. The way we learn is by being introspective; by admitting our faults and also surrounding ourselves with people who will give us the straight story with good advice and challenge us to grow.

The Mission of the Church will always be salvation of souls, and we partake in that mission when we trust the Church to guide us and testify to our faith through our words and actions. I often hear this in funeral planning. I hear

the stories of how a person's loved one breathed life into them as a person of love, joy and service who lived out their faith, and used their relationship with them to bring them closer to God. A person may have had authority as a parent or grandparent, but so often they used it for the right reason. So, let's not be like Shebna, but be like Peter, using the power God has given us not for our glory but for His, unlocking the locks of ego, sin, selfishness, self-doubt and despair through the power of God's love to bring people to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church Jesus gave us will help us do that and guided by her like Simon Peter we too will be fishers of men.