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Reserving judgment about Pope Francis

Maureen Fiedler | Mar. 25, 2013 NCR Today

OK, I've been guilty of a little gushing over the new pope myself, both in private conversations and on TV. But in reality, I'm reserving judgment to see how this papacy unfolds. The symbols have been great; the reality has yet to come.

On the question of symbols (and these are important symbols, I grant you): I was thrilled at the choice of his name (Francis of Assisi being one of my favorite saints of all time) and with his rejection of much of the pomp and circumstance of the papacy. I am delighted with his words about a "church for the poor," and as I said in one place, that sounds suspiciously like the Gospel. It was refreshing. I haven't heard anything like it from a pope in a very long time.

He gets kudos too for taking up the environment as a cause as heard in his inaugural homily [1] -- more embracing of Francis. And I am delighted he will celebrate Holy Thursday [2] at a juvenile detention center and wash the feet of some of the young inmates there.

But the deeper questions remain.

What will he do to enhance the role of women in the church?

Is he willing to take a new look at issues involving gays and lesbians? His record in Argentina leaves much to be desired.

How will he tackle the sex abuse crisis? Will he punish members of the hierarchy involved in cover-up? When I was on CBS a couple of weeks ago, another panelist reported -- erroneously, it turns out -- that he had banished Cardinal Bernard Law to a monastery. Thinking it was true, I was thrilled that someone at his level might be held accountable. But alas, it was a false report [3]. But would Pope Francis begin to make moves like this?

Will he clean up the Vatican Curia? Send some department heads packing? Appoint some women to high positions there?

Is he willing to rethink the issue of contraception (which the Catholic laity have already done for him)? Would he promote the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS?

Does he think women are moral adults in making reproductive decisions?

These are just a few of the questions I and I'm sure others have as we watch this new papacy evolve.

A Vatican spring? We've seen a couple buds, but I'm still waiting for the flowers.

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