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Francis and the Very New Evangelism

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NCR Today

We've all heard of the New Evangelism. I think it's time to recognize something else going on in the church. Maybe we should call it the Very New Evangelism. The Very New Evangelism is the kind of evangelism we find being preached by Pope Francis. This evangelism is about serving the needy and offering encouragement. It's about modeling ways Christians can be, well, be Christians in day-to-day life.

Francis' Very New Evangelism has a crisp clarity about it. It's not wordy or abstract. It's concrete. It's about preaching through example. It's about recognizing that the act itself is the method of preaching. This is what's called spreading the Good News.

You will recall the day Pope Francis visited migrant refugees stranded on a Mediterranean island.

Or the way he interacts with young, offering encouragement.

It's about the way Francis told us to stop judging others, starting with sexual orientations.

It's about the way Francis last week consoled a rape victim in a phone call he made.

It's about the way Francis has connected daily Eucharist with prison life.

It's about teaching us how to live through little, ordinary acts and words, which are neither little nor ordinary.

The Very New Evangelism preached by Francis is simple, practical stuff. It's about what it means to live the beatitudes in today's life.

This Very New Evangelism builds on the evangelisms that have come before it, and, in theory, is no different. It's the method of preaching that seems to be changing under Francis.

Francis' preaching style is simple, authentic and done without posturing. His message is aimed at teaching clerics how to be priests. It is aimed at teaching all of us how to be Christians. Yes, we know Francis is committed to reforming the Roman curia. Now we're beginning to understand he's also trying to reform our understanding of church. He's doing this by preaching humility as when he washed the feet of prisoners or when he bowed last week before a woman. He's trying to break open old church divisions by lowering the oh, so, old and off putting and debilitating clericalism so rampant in our church today.

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Francis' Very New Evangelism seems to be working. Our church has gotten more good press & more preaching media play & in the last 150 days than during the entire 15,000 days that preceded it. We'll have to see how far this goes, how inclusive the logic of Francis' renewal goes. But it's exciting to awaken to Good News out of Rome almost on a daily basis. This is, indeed, some Very New Evangelism.

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