

Francesco

Public Television and other film sources have treated us to the moving story of Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio transformed into the first Pope Francis, the namesake of the priest's order of St. Francis. His character—pre-pope--was also displayed in the recent feature film "Two Popes". which posed his intellectual duel with his predecessor, Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). Thus moviegoers have seen a head of the Holy Roman Catholic Church who honors the traits of his Italian namesake such as humility, charity, international visibility, and commitment to interreligious dialogue and to the poor.

Showing this man's awareness and embracing of humanity is the point of a new, laudatory documentary "Francesco," which is not a strict biography of Francis but rather a rich tapestry of his progress from Archbishop of Buenos Aires to the Holy See in 2013. It also signals Francis's openness to all and his pervasive involvement in world problems and people's earthly as well as religious lives.

The film is mostly chronological, but it takes a few side roads, one to establish some of his clerical background in his native Argentina, and in Buenos Aires, his home town where he spent most of his life. He did spend a couple years in semi-exile in Cordova after being associated with the repressive military regime in his country. Typically, though, most sequences stress his travels, pronouncements, and activities during his current reign.

One of the first, for example, is his issuing of the landmark 2015 encyclical "*Laudato si*" on the subject of irresponsible development and climate change, a papal critique never declared before. "Francesco" shows the pontiff traveling the world to serve his flock, but also to reach out to other faiths, exemplified in a landmark visit to Indonesia. It shows him struggling with current issues of doctrine, including how to handle divorced Catholics wanting to be remarried in the faith and how to reconcile Catholicism and LGBTQ persons.

This latter subject produces one of the film's most touching through-stories, when he befriends a gay countryman, Juan Carlos Cruz, and takes him into his confidence, and is eager to hear his views at an audience in the Vatican. The film makes clear that he cannot go all the way with gay and lesbian marriages, yet he sympathetically considers the real value of same-sex unions.

The film notes, too, that the Pope, like much of the church's hierarchy, was slow to acknowledge the church's dismal legacy of child sexual abuse, but later sequences show him becoming more aware of these practices and starting to address them by providing penalties to one notorious abuser as well as a whole cluster of priests who hushed up the exposure of such practices.

In covering what many might see as a lavish life, Russian filmmaker Evgeny Afineevsky ("Cries from Syria") sometimes uses lavish camerawork, with swooping shots over vast crowds (such as those at the Vatican, in Bangladesh, and in Indonesia), often setting the Pope, in modest white garb, as a fixed figure

in a vast multitude. The director is also adept at contrasting the ever-humble Francis moving easily through the Vatican's ever present opulence. He is just as good at capturing Francis in one-on-one conversations, where he appears to be one of the best of listeners, or in directly addressing the movie audience, where his careful, soft diction in Spanish or Italian will be easy for many English speakers to understand.

Some filmgoers will call this portrayal hagiography (which is fair), but the film still shows, with clarity, multiple dimensions of a good and caring soul.

(This film, which runs 116 minutes, is "no-rated." The sound track, taken mostly from Pope Francis's own words, is mostly in Spanish and Italian, with subtitles.)

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