

## Creating History

As I write this on 13 March, I remember that history was created on this day in 2013. But what was the event and what triggered it?

On the morning of 11 February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI announced his intention to step down as leader of the Catholic Church on grounds of failing health. He was the first Pope to relinquish the office on his own initiative since Celestine V in 1294 (*Pope Gregory XII resigned in 1415, but under duress at a time of political uncertainty in the church*).

The conclave to elect Pope Benedict's successor began on 12 March 2013 and the following day, history was created when Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, was elected Pope. He is the first Jesuit pope, the first pope from the Americas, the first from the Southern Hemisphere and the first to take the name Francis.

This "unknown man" from Buenos Aires was introduced to a puzzled, but rapturous crowd in St Peter's Square. His opening words were incredibly warm: "***Brothers and sisters, good evening.***" After a short address, he concluded: "***I would like to ask you a favour. I ask you to pray to the Lord so that he blesses me and then I will bless you.***" And finally: "***Good night and have a good rest.***"

Eight months later on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013, Pope Francis published his first major document - an Apostolic Exhortation entitled: "***Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel***"

These are the opening words: "***THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.***" (paragraph 1) He goes on to say: "***I invite all Christians everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.***" (para. 3)

**The Parish Team** has reflected a great deal on this and other documents in recent months and has considered ways we as a parish could respond to the call from the Holy Father. **Our first response** is to dedicate the remainder of the year to prayer and we shall endeavour to offer more opportunities to parishioners to deepen our understanding of prayer and to learn about different forms of prayer. In February, almost 50 parishioners started a course on prayer, entitled "OREMUS". There will be more.

**Our next step** is to consider what Pope Francis asks of all of us in the very first paragraph of The Joy of the Gospel, where he adds, "***I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation marked by this joy.***"

The very word, evangelisation, can strike fear or suspicion in the minds and hearts of Catholics – surely this is something others do isn't it? Not Catholics! Evangelisation is very much misunderstood; it simply means, "to announce or proclaim the good news" and it's what we are called to be – to be the Gospel to all we meet and to rejoice always. (1 Thessalonians 5: 16). How shall I respond to Pope Francis' call?

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