



Our first impression  
of our new Pope

The past year has seen significant changes in the leadership of the Catholic Church in Oregon. A pope has resigned; a new one has been elected. The state's two dioceses have new bishops. Archbishop Sample was installed in Portland on the anniversary of the death of Blessed John Paul II; I was ordained Bishop of Baker on the anniversary of his birth. We begin our service as bishops here with a providential link to the Pope of the New Evangelization—and fittingly enough, for our bond as bishops is essential to the living unity of the Catholic Church.

From the first hour of his election, Pope Francis has notably referred to himself as “Bishop of Rome.” This title tells us a lot. He is first of all a bishop, a successor to the Apostles like every other bishop. If he had been a layman, a deacon, or a priest when he was elected (as happened more than once a thousand years ago), he would have been ordained bishop immediately. This would have been necessary, because he is not just any bishop, but the *head* of the body of bishops, the bishop responsible for preserving the bishops' unity and the unity of the universal Church. And he is their head because he is Bishop of *Rome* and therefore the successor of *Peter*. Archbishop Sample and I are successors of the Apostles as well, but we do not take the place of one or

another of them specifically—of St. John, for example, or of St. James. No, Jesus built his Church on the rock of *Peter's* confession of faith and designated *him* to strengthen his brother bishops. It is Peter's cross of holy responsibility which Pope Francis has agreed to bear for us.

His attitude toward his new responsibility fittingly reflects the humility and simplicity of the saint whose name he has taken. “When a pope . . . must say, ‘I am in charge here,’” he wrote in his autobiography, “it is because . . . he is seeking to attribute it to himself with words . . . Having the staff of command does not mean giving orders and imposing, but serving.” His decision to wash and kiss the feet of prisoners on his first Holy Thursday as pope suggests that our new Holy Father does not so much want to *proclaim* his supreme power as successor of Peter as to *exercise* it in the spirit of his Master and Lord. From all indications, Pope Francis is a man who bears watching—and imitating.