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## 'BIG PAPA' AND I

## Derrick Quintero

I am a new convert to Catholicism. I am currently studying the series, "Why Catholic: Journey Through the Catechism." I am imprisoned on Tennessee's death row. I did not seek out religion because I am nearing an execution date. I would never do so, just for this reason. How this came to pass is just another intersecting spoke in the Being that I am in this moment of time.

My Papa had a social democrat orientation. There is very little he would not give to someone who was in need. Once Papa decided to go into business for himself, his Being who he was, conflicted with the basic economics involved in business. The banker understood the economics of sustainability. As such, they foreclosed on all our properties, including our home.

The one thing the bank could not take from Papa was himself: his Way of Being in the world. Papa is 83 years old. His mobility is becoming progressively limited by work related injuries to his spine and neck and by heart surgery. Regardless of these facts, he still works to give away some-

thing: the food in the big garden behind the house Mom has in her name. This story is not about Mom, but it should be. This story is about finding a new community and relevance through divergent, yet interconnected truths.

Like many, I was watching the whole process involved in the coronation of Pope Francis. And, like many, Catholic or not, I was not only jaded but skeptical. After all, there had been scandals and issues of exclusivity abounding until it tried the faith of the most ardent Catholic. I kept listening and watching, but mostly watching. I have social cue recognition problems, so watching him Walk was the most important thing for me. Then, and only then, could I hear the Truth of his Being in the World.

I watched the Pope wash the feet of juvenile prisoners. I watched him decline the use of a hired car for his own jalopy. I watched him decline the "Pope Mobile's" protective glass to walk unafraid amongst the masses. I watched him cook his own meals. I watched him stand before the cardinals and tell them that they had not been living their faith, due to the excess and forming cliques and exclusionary practices. I watched him tell the world that he would reform the corruption in the Churches banking system. I watched him reach out to try to heal the wounds of children abused by priests. I heard him say, in essence, that the Church cannot ask for forgiveness and healing without publicly admitting the harm it has done and enact immediate reforms. I could not even read Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation without first believing him by watching and hearing his Truth in action.

As I read the *Evangelii gaudium*, I relive the sight of my own Papa being able to rally his fellow, blue collar,

working class, and mostly poor, neighbors against social justice causes because he always “‘smell[ed] of the sheep.’” My Papa knew their pain and suffering because he walked amongst them, even when he had the means to not do so. How can I not smile, also, when I read the Pope’s words, that mirrors my Papa’s, concerning the need to defend the masses from being marginalized by an economy that is based upon “exclusion and inequality.”

Pope Francis spoke to my Spirit when he wrote: “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances ... and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” I am oft heard to say that I have met so many self-professed Christians coming into prisons who are only worried about our soul with no care to our daily suffering. I do not stay around these people very long. I believe we, as Christians, must minister to the mind, the body and the soul. To do otherwise would make it about your ego and not about easing the suffering of one’s neighbor.

My Papa goes to a tiny, non-denominational, Cowboy Church in Springtown, Texas. Comparatively speaking, Pope Francis has a larger family to tend to than my Papa. That makes the Pope the “Big Papa.” It would be the right thing, as well as the best thing for all of us, if you also included Mom in your prayer. I am sure you understand.

In prayer for Peace, Love and Inclusion  
Derrick Quintero