

Great job, Lolo Kiko!

Following the death of Pope Francis, Raul A. Nidoy, a Filipino theologian reflects on what he considers the top 7 accomplishments of the late Pontiff.

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I am moved while I review a video of my recent close encounter with Pope Francis, our Lolo Kiko. It was last January during the Jubilee for Communicators. He was being wheeled through the central aisle of the auditorium, people crowding

towards him. A lady nearby was shouting words of thanks, and so I joined her in expressing my gratitude. Beside me was a fellow Pinoy who kept on repeating, Mabuhay, Lolo Kiko!

Thinking of something personal to say, I shouted: Te queremos mucho, Santo Padre. Great job! It was a conviction I have always kept, despite articles from various Catholic sites that criticize the Holy Father.

As a theologian, I try to base my thinking on current issues from the perspective of faith, which is basically God's viewpoint. Faith in all the teachings of Jesus and his Church, which includes faith in God who decided to speak and govern through a pope.

From the start, I hoped that Pope Francis would tackle the problems of the relativistic and secularized West as St. Pope John Paul II—the Great—

tackled and brought down the totalitarian communistic empire of Eastern Europe. And at once, after hearing his first interview, my heart swelled in expectation.

Pope Francis viewed the Church and the world as a field hospital—so many people wounded, so much suffering. And what struck me most was his emphasis on mercy. For one, it is emblazoned in his own motto: *Miserando atque eligendo*, having mercy and choosing, showing thus that mercy will permeate his entire pontificate.

More importantly, he gave it a strong theological basis. Mercy is not one more trait of God. Mercy is the central truth of God. Being central, this insight has operationalizing implications on how we are to live our lives, on how the whole Church has to be organized.

After his death, I posted this on my Facebook page, and after thinking more about it, I realized that Mercy truly underlies all of his work:

“I loved Pope Francis and would like to hail all the great things he has done for us. I believe these are his top seven accomplishments:

1. *God is Mercy: be merciful.* He helped us focus on the innermost truth of God: Mercy. And so if we want to be united to God, our only goal, then we have to be merciful to the people around us, especially the sinners, the ignorant, the poor and all the needy.

2. *Centrality of the kerygma: God loves us, died for us, is alive and near us.* This central truth of our life, he taught, is the center of all our efforts to renew our lives. Contemplating God who loves us infinitely at every moment moves us to love God and neighbor generously.

3. Primacy and infinite dignity of each person. We will truly be able to love God--a trinity of persons--and neighbor if we value each person's infinite dignity. Current moral deviations--like abortion, same-sex marriage, climate indifference, lack of care for sinners--are rooted in forgetting the infinite dignity of each person, each one of whom we have to serve.

4. Co-responsibility of everyone in the Church (Synodality). Since all of us are other Christs, all of us are Church. All of us are co-responsible in directing our journey towards God. This push of Francis unleashes all of the energies of Catholics to move the Church forward.

5. Reform of Church governance for evangelization. He reformed the Curia and all the instruments of government so that all governance is for evangelization. Since

evangelization is the mission and life of the Church--the reason we exist--then the transmission of truth (doctrine) and the Church's governing rules (canon law) should be at the service of leading people to Christ through the Gospel.

6. Joy of the Gospel, of sanctity and the family. The title of three key documents of his contained the idea of joy. Christian life is all of about joy. Living true to Christ's work of evangelization, to his call that we be saints and to caring for the family is a source of the greatest joy.

7. Basis for peaceful coexistence of the Church with liberals, secularists, Muslims and other groups. Pope Francis laid the groundwork for establishing harmony with groups that historically had relationship issues with the Church. Establishing peace is a basic role of any leader so that his organization can flourish.

Even more, the once highly critical and very influential liberals are now on the Pope's side.”

From this post, you will understand why my last words to our beloved Lolo Kiko was: Great job!

He understood God, whom he loved with all his heart and might. And understanding God so deeply, he has left a legacy that will not last only until this year. Since mercy is the central truth of God and God's nature is forever, this legacy is for all times. And we are fortunate—deeply fortunate—for being his children in this new stage of the Church—a stage of the centrality and operationalization of Mercy—that will have to last forever.

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