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The Footprints of Pope Francis.

The US-based Jewish writer Jonathan Safran Foer reflects on the legacy of Pope Francis, who "reminded us of what we continually forget: goodness is not an idea but a practice."

By Jonathan Safran Foer

There are people who do not merely walk the earth, but whose steps leave footprints for us to follow. At a time when theology so often becomes a slogan or abstraction, when speed is valued above significance, and the will to power risks dominating every aspect of life, Pope Francis embodied compassion. He walked in the path of the prophets—not to foretell, but to remind. He reminded us of what we continually forget: goodness is not an idea but a practice.

Pope Francis called for a revolution of tenderness. As I understand it, this revolution is not bound to any particular set of beliefs, but to being perpetually disturbed. To risk opening one's eyes enough to see the world as it is, and to ache for what it must become. (As each of us is a part of the world, we must also see ourselves as we are.) Consciousness is not a privilege, but a summons. When we encounter injustice or suffering, we must hear the echoes of Sinai: Thou shalt not remain indifferent.

Francis did not speak merely to Catholics, nor even to Christians alone. As a Jewish person, I found him to be the most inspiring---the most disturbing---leader of my lifetime. He spoke to the human soul at an historical moment when we have been encouraged to believe we no longer have souls, and so no longer have responsibilities. In his voice, there was an echo of the ancient cry: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?"

If only we knew where God was! Without knowing, we often walk in the wrong directions (toward signifiers of achievement, fleeting pleasures, relief from our insecurities), or feel too lost to move at all, and so find ways to distract ourselves from our souls. Pope Francis's footsteps give us a path—not yet fulfilled, but bravely begun. We must become human enough to follow.