

New film shines spotlight on the impact of Pope Francis

The big star of the latest Salt and Light Media Foundation documentary is Pope Francis, which should surprise no one who knows Salt and Light, producer and director Sebastian Gomes said ahead of the premiere of his film, *The Francis Impact*.

“Whoever the pope is, we support him,” Gomes said. “And we try very hard – at least at Salt and Light – to reflect on what are the priorities he’s giving, what are the messages he’s sending.”

The Pope’s four-minute message at the end of a one-and-a-half hour movie might not seem to amount to a starring role, but speaking directly into Gomes’s camera about the Christian duty to discover the world and the people who are threatened and vulnerable on the peripheries of our safe and comfortable lives, Pope Francis pulls together a sprawling and ambitious exploration of the challenges of Catholic life in the 21st century.

The Francis Impact, airing on Salt and Light TV May 5 (6 p.m. Alberta time), tells four different stories in four different parts of the world and in four different languages.

In El Salvador, Gomes tells a story of how ordinary people finally found an ally in the Church for their fight against the ecological destruction rendered by mining.

In Lampedusa, the filmmakers introduce us to the people who have worked on behalf of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean in tiny, unsafe boats.

In St. Cloud, Minn., the camera turns its attention to the intimate story of a Catholic couple who wanted their second marriage to happen in the Catholic Church, with the Eucharist.

In Quebec City, we watch Cardinal Gérald Lacroix forge bonds of friendship in the immigrant Muslim community after a gunman’s terrifying rampage that killed six worshippers as they prayed.

Migration, ecology, interfaith dialogue and family life – four major themes of the Francis pontificate reflected in major documents and acts over the last six years, including *Laudato Si’*, *Amoris Laetitia*, the agreement with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* and the creation of a new Vatican department for the Promotion of Integral Human Development.

It might seem like too much to stuff into one film, but the ace up Gomes's sleeve is Pope Francis. The Pope boils it all down to Matthew 25.

"When Jesus proclaims that protocol, notice that they are always things on the peripheries," Pope Francis says. "Feed the hungry: a periphery. Give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, visit the sick – they are all peripheries. Jesus sends us to the peripheries."

"I'm not that presumptuous to tell the Pope what he should say. It wasn't an interview process," explained Gomes. "You know, he's the Pope. He can say what he wants. We made sure he was free. He had carte blanche to say whatever he wanted. None of us knew exactly what he was going to say."

But Francis had seen excerpts from the movie before the final edit and had spoken to Salt and Light CEO Rev. Tom Rosica. He knew where Gomes was going with his four separate stories.

"He has a clear understanding of what we tried to do," said Gomes. "Everything makes sense and is tied together because these are the things he has been most passionate about."

The Francis Impact started out as the natural sequel to Gomes's 2014 documentary, *The Francis Effect*. While that movie concentrated on the Pope himself, *The Francis Impact* takes the focus off the Argentinian bishop of Rome and looks at the people whose world has changed in the wake of his teaching.

Gomes describes the Pope's final four minutes as "the cherry on top."

The film will be rebroadcast several times on Salt and Light TV, but can also be streamed live on the web at saltandlighttv.org/live.