A Reluctant Celebrity

The Harlem Globetrotters made him an honorary member. Hillary Clinton has said she envies people who’ll meet him. And he’ll get a 21-gun salute at the White House. But the VIP fawning has hardly swept Francis off his feet. “To depict the Pope as a kind of superman or a star seems to me offensive,” he has said. Any swag he receives—whether an iPad (from a Uruguayan priest) or a Harley-Davidson motorcycle (from the company)—is auctioned for charity. Which might explain why President Obama, selecting a gift last year, stuck with seeds from his wife’s garden. Francis himself is not a fussy gift giver. As pal Mercedes Ninci and other friends from Argentina said their goodbyes after an August visit, Ninci recalls, “he disappeared for 10 minutes” to find them a bottle of grappa to take home.

WHERE HE STANDS

WOMEN
The priesthood is still out of the question, but Francis encourages female leadership in the Church: “The feminine genius is needed.”

GAYS
“If a homosexual person is of goodwill and is in search of God, I am no one to judge.” With that, he transformed the Church’s tone from condemnation to compassion—but did not overturn its stand that homosexual acts are a sin.

GREED
His personal frugality dovetails with his vision of “a Church which is poor and for the poor.”

Denouncing trickle-down economics and the “idolization” of money over people, Francis suspended a German bishop who spent $43 million on a mansion. And with Syrian refugees flooding Europe, he directed churches to take them in, starting with the Vatican.

GLOBAL WARMING
With experience in chemistry, Francis issued a data-driven encyclical this year saying humanity’s unfettered pursuit of profit risks turning Earth into an “immense pile of filth.”

SEX ABUSE
After initially defending the Church’s handling of the scandal, he asked forgiveness for the “evil” of some priests and appointed a woman who was molested as a child to his commission tackling “the shame of the Church.”
Pope Mania!

For the faithful seeking souvenirs of Francis’s visit, there’s a commemorative crucifix plus prayer cards galore. More irreverent offerings include bobbleheads, papal beer and Debby Fireman’s Pope Toaster, which brands his visage onto your breakfast. “We’re all just trying to create something that spreads his joy,” says Fireman.

I ❤️ Pope Francis

2. Bleacher Creatures plush likeness.
3. A button from store.popefrancisvisit.com.

By Sandra Sobieraj Westfall with Praxilla Trabattoni in Rome, Diane Herbst and Tierney McAfee