In a famous book which sets forth certain prophecies by Saint Francis — while carefully distinguishing them from doubtful sayings attributed to him (which are found in an appendix to the book) — we read the following stunning revelation to the members of the order he founded, at the center of which is a future occupant of the Chair of Peter:

> A short time before the holy Father's [St. Francis'] death, he called together his children and warned them of the coming troubles:
>
> "Act bravely, my brethren; take courage and trust in the Lord. The time is fast approaching in which there will be great trials and afflictions; perplexities and dissensions, both spiritual and temporal, will abound; the charity of many will grow cold, and the malice of the wicked will increase. The devils will have unusual power; the immaculate purity of our Order, and of others, will be so much obscured that *there will be very few Christians who obey the true Supreme Pontiff and the Roman Church* with loyal hearts and perfect charity.
>
> "At the time of this tribulation ***a man, not canonically elected, will be raised to the Pontificate, who, by his cunning, will endeavour to draw many into error and death***. Then scandals will be multiplied, our Order will be divided, and many others will be entirely destroyed, because they will consent to error instead of opposing it.
>
> "There will be such *diversity of opinions and schisms among the people, the religious and the clergy,* that, except those days were shortened, according to the words of the Gospel, even the elect would be led into error, were they not specially guided, amid such great confusion, by the immense mercy of God.…
>
> "*Those who preserve their fervor and adhere to virtue with love and zeal for the truth, will suffer injuries and persecutions as rebels and schismatics*; for their persecutors, urged on by the evil spirits, will say they are rendering a great service to God by destroying such pestilent men from the face of the earth…
>
> "Some preachers will keep silent about the truth, and others will trample it under foot and deny it. ***Sanctity of life will be held in derision even by those who outwardly profess it, for in those days Our Lord Jesus Christ will send them, not a true Pastor, but a destroyer."***
>
> (*Works of the Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi* [London: R. Washbourne, 1882], pp. 248-250) [paragraph breaks added]

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This prophecy cannot be dismissed as a reference to the coming Great Western Schism (1378-1417), when at one time there were three claimants to the papal throne, only one of whom was validly elected. The Great Western Schism did not involve the scenario that Francis describes: a "destroyer" Pope who leads the faithful into error, widespread apostasy, and the persecution of faithful Catholics as "schismatics."

Who is the Pope in the prophecy? It is impossible to say with certainty, although readers will certainly have their own ideas. Why, then, do I cite it? Because it demonstrates that one of the greatest saints in Church history was given by Heaven itself to know that there would come a time when the very occupant of the Chair of Peter would endeavor to wreck the Church and lead souls to ruin, and that even such a catastrophic development would not be inconsistent with the Church's indefectibility or the respect owed to the Petrine office within the limits of its authority, which is supreme but not absolute.

There is, however, an interesting anecdote regarding the current pontificate: the former Cardinal Bergoglio is the one and only occupant of the Petrine office who took the name of Saint Francis. In that regard, as I noted elsewhere:

> "Antonio Socci gives a surprising new indication of just how out-of-control [Pope Francis] is in his column of September 24, entitled "What He Did He Wanted to Do as 'Pope Jesus II', the Demolitionist." [Socci] begins by noting that in the just-published book-interview with Dominique Wilton, Bergoglio jokes that he chose the papal name Francis not as an act of *superbia* but rather of humility, because then 'he would have been able to call himself 'Jesus II' — a reference to the common description of Saint Francis of Assisi as an *alter Christus*, 'another Christ.' While this was only a joke, it was a very revealing one: the phrase 'Jesus II' evinces an arrogant flippancy regarding both Our Lord and the great saint who is popularly likened to Him."

Make of it what you will. But this much is clear: Saint Francis of Assisi would view with horror the divisive, chaos-inducing words and deeds of any Pope — but particularly the Pope who has presumed to take his name, whether or not he would see in his namesake the very Pope of his prophecy.

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