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All things Irish will no doubt be the photographic focus on this high holy feast day. But another’s anniversary could also be celebrated.

It’s been one year since Pope Francis’s first post on Instagram. His simple message coincided with the devotional image that remains as his profile: “Pray for me.” His profoundly human and pontifically pastoral intent for joining this virtual community spoke volumes and continues to headline his account: “I want to walk with you along the way of God’s mercy and tenderness.”

That papal account shattered records by amassing a million followers within the first twelve hours of being online. Today, more than 3.6 million people are daily #blessed by images of franciscus.

The photos posted there may not have as direct or as significant an impact as seeing the pope in person, but the worldwide reach exceeds the assembled crowds anywhere. And in these momentary glimpses two momentous truths come to life.

One concerns the pope, himself. Greg Burke, the director of the Vatican’s press office, points it out: “The Pope has helped people rediscover the joy of what it means to believe. That despite anyone’s limitations, despite their sins, despite the crosses one might have to carry, there is an inherent joy in the Christian life.”

The other concerns the pope’s work, his mission as “pontifex” to bridge the Church and the world. Msgr. Lucio Adrian Ruiz explains how, at a meeting with the co-founder of Instagram, Pope Francis spoke about the Church’s historical affinity with pictures “as a way to be close to the people and even to do catechesis.”

Today’s preferred medium for this closeness may not be Renaissance art or stained glass windows. But, as I’ve said before, it can effect a similar “epiphany” of understanding when the photos express the attractive beauty of the Gospel message. On Instagram, the world sees that message come to life in the day-to-day events on the pope’s schedule.

Granted, a stream of photos does not, of itself, generate the dialogue that the pope so frequently says is necessary for real communications. And, yes, the pope is right to exhort people to consult the Bible as often as they do their cellphones.

But the digital world is where we live, whether or not we are active on social networks. And photos or videos are the preferred and enormously popular means of communications there. So, it’s not just helpful that Pope Francis is on Instagram; it’s necessary if he, and we, wish to encounter and engage the masses.

Today, while we raise a pint to celebrate Patrick, let’s also wish Francis a Happy Instaversary!