

Pope Francis Memorial Mass 28 April 2025

Much has been said this past week about Pope Francis. So, it's not my intention now to offer another outline or commentary of his many contributions to the life of the Church and the world. The main purpose of our Memorial Mass is to pray for him - which I'm sure is what he would want from us more than anything else at this time.

As he took his first steps into his new life as Pope in 2013 the first thing he did, before offering his blessing to the people, was to bow his head and ask the people to pray for him. Now, as he takes the first steps of his final journey into eternity, I'm sure he would want the same again – for us to pray for the mercy of God upon him before he again blesses us, this time not from the balcony of Saint Peter's, but from the house of the Father.

And so, we offer our fervent prayers for the repose of his soul; that God will reward his good and faithful servant who served with love and joy until the very end. But since we gather also to give communal expression to our gratitude to God for all that Francis has been and done for us, it is fitting that I say a couple of things.

I think Pope Francis will be remembered for calling us back to the basics: living the *joy* of the Gospel; trusting in God's *mercy*; *listening* to each other; having *hope* for the future; *caring* for one another and for our common home; and being a Church that is focussed on sharing the Gospel of Christ with the world rather than on our own self-preservation. But, perhaps most of all, for his genuine and humble love of God and neighbour; his unwavering commitment to justice, particularly when it came to advocating for the poor and marginalised; and his insistence that we be a Church of mercy and service.

As Cardinal Re said at the Pope's funeral Mass in Rome, "Francis was motivated by the conviction that the Church is capable of bending down to every person, regardless of their beliefs or condition, and healing their wounds." Francis lived this by example. He had been Pope only a few weeks when on Holy Thursday, instead of washing the feet of cardinals in an elaborate celebration in Saint Peter's Basilica, he visited a prison and washed the feet of prisoners of all faiths and none. He did this every year. And this is just one of many examples.

It was commonly reported that on Easter Sunday this year, the day before he died, the Pope carried out his last official duty, blessing the people in Saint Peter's Square and making one last round through the crowds in the Popemobile. Truly, a good shepherd wanting to be with the people and, to use his expression, having the smell of the sheep on him until the very end!

What's not so commonly reported is that three days earlier on Holy Thursday he made one final visit to prison when he was supposed to be home getting bed rest. This time he was unable to bend down and wash the prisoners' feet, but he was able to take to them the good news of God's love and closeness to them, and to bring them glad tidings of the approaching celebration of the Lord's resurrection.

How fitting that the Pope chose as the First Reading for his funeral, the passage from the Acts of the Apostles which proclaims that God does not have favourites, and that we as people of faith,

are witnesses in the world to all the good that Jesus did, especially his death on the cross for us and his resurrection to new life. It seems to me that, as successor of Saint Peter, Pope Francis took these words especially to heart.

One of Pope Francis' parting gifts to us was to choose 'pilgrims of hope' as the theme for this Jubilee Year 2025. A hope which he says is founded in the Lord's resurrection from the dead, such that we can live our lives knowing that we are not doomed to a dead end or dark abyss but directed to an encounter with the Lord of glory. That God called him home to glory as we were celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ in this Jubilee Year of Hope is, I believe, no accident.

In the Gospel for Francis' Funeral Mass, we hear the conversation - or job interview, if you like - between Jesus and Peter as the Lord appoints him chief pastor of the Church with the command "feed my lambs, feed my sheep". Peter must answer the Lord's three questions: "Do you love me? Do you love me? And do you love me?"

Above all else, Francis loved God and devoted his whole life to his service. And understanding that true love of God must be actualised in love of one's neighbour, he loved his neighbour too, especially the poor, the lowly, and marginalised with whom Jesus identified himself.

Choosing to be buried in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, Francis gave final expression to another great love in his life - Mary the Mother of God. He prayed before her image in this Church whenever returning home from an apostolic voyage or from a hospital visit including his most recent. Vatican II called the Virgin Mary "a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God". We can be certain that she has accompanied Francis on his final trip home.

Let's conclude then with these final words from the commendation at Francis' Funeral Mass: May the angels lead you into paradise, may the martyrs welcome you and take you to the Holy City, the new and eternal Jerusalem. May the choir of angels welcome you and with Lazarus who is poor no longer, may you have eternal rest."