

together



“I don’t want to be an
ice cream seller”

Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine *Together* is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing


down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. *Together* is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together.

Together is also an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to editor@togethermagazine.in before the 15th of every month.

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Pope Francis

1936-2025

A life marked by significant events that illustrate the consistent thread of his dedication to humanity, service to the marginalised, and his inspiring efforts to address the challenges facing the world.

KAPIL ARAMBAM



DEC 17, 1936

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Eldest of five in an Italian immigrant family

SEP 21, 1953

Felt vocation to the priesthood

A life-changing confession sparked his calling

MAR 11, 1958

Entered Jesuit novitiate

Began religious training with the Society of Jesus



SEP 2015

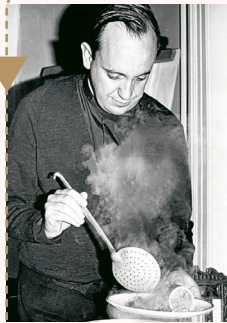
Addressed the US Congress and the United Nations

Spoke on issues of immigration, climate change, and global responsibility

2020

Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* published

Promoted universal fraternity and social friendship



MAY 20, 1992

Named auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires

First episcopal appointment

1973-1979

Jesuit provincial superior (Argentina)

Led the Jesuits during Argentina's dictatorship

DEC 13, 1969

Ordained a priest

Start of his priestly ministry



DEC 2023

Approved blessings for same-sex couples

Signaled a more welcoming stance towards LGBTQ+ community

MAR 2021

Historic visit to Iraq

Met with top Shiite Muslim cleric, promoting interfaith dialogue



FEB 28, 1998

Became Archbishop of Buenos Aires

Known for his humility and work with the poor

FEB 21, 2001

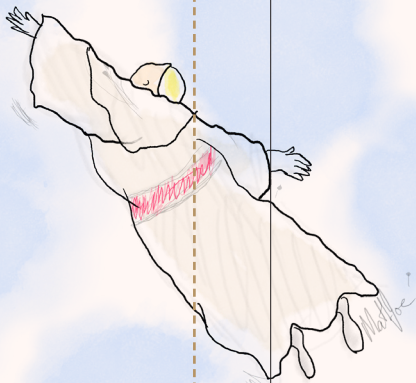
Elevated to Cardinal

Honoured for his service and leadership

MAR 13, 2013

Elected Pope Francis

First Jesuit Pope, first from the Americas



2015

Encyclical *Laudato si'* published

Called for urgent action on climate change and environmental stewardship

JULY 2013

First papal trip to Lampedusa

Highlighted the plight of migrants and refugees, denouncing the "globalisation of indifference"

APR 21, 2025

Passed away

End of a remarkable life dedicated to faith, service, and inspiring humanity



Pope Francis—Fully Human and Fully Pope

Pope Francis led the Church with the authority and obligation of a co-pilgrim. He became the conscience of the Church.

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

Long before Pope Francis fell ill and the Catholic world began talking about what is next and who is next; while Pope Francis was still making waves of change in the Catholic and non-Catholic world, I heard men of the Church judging him, saying he needed to be a little more careful, tactful, and diplomatic; take time to speak and act—meaning to be conservative and moderate like the Church almost always has been. The pressure on Pope Francis was that he must restrain from saying things that would make him and the Church look weak, vulnerable, and human.

I was of the opinion that the authority and influence of a Pope, the vicar of Jesus, who sits in a pompous cathedra is to be enduring even at the point of embracing vulnerabilities, and not run away; be comfortable with others and varied perspectives; face discomfort, sweat, anger; laugh at power; and 'have the smell of the sheep.' Be a man with whom flesh and blood can connect; make the papacy not just about chair, crozier, the papal tiara, and playing safe. Pope Francis led the Church with the authority and obligations of a co-pilgrim. He became the conscience of the Church. Individuals, communities, and nations experienced kindness and understanding. An eager world, longing for empathy and compassion took notice, and said, Amen.

Mario Bergoglio's family had immigrated to Argentina in 1929 to escape the oppressive fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. This background likely instilled in the family a deep appreciation for freedom and perhaps a sensitivity towards issues of human dignity, social justice, and human rights.

He Could Feel

Mario Bergoglio held various jobs, including working as a janitor, a bouncer at a nightclub, and as a chemical technician. These diverse experiences in different work environments provided him with a grounded perspective and an understanding of the challenges and realities faced by people from various walks of life. As a priest, his deep empathy led him to personally assist and offer solace to individuals struggling with drug addiction, prostitution, and those trapped in situations of human slavery.

Pope Francis signaled a more inclusive and welcoming stance towards LGBTQ+ individuals, famously responding to a question about a gay priest with the now-iconic words, "Who am I to judge?" This statement marked a significant shift in tone and signaled a move towards greater acceptance.

He Could Laugh

Pope Francis possessed a good sense of humor, particularly directed at conservatism, hypocrisy, power, and himself; suggesting that a lack of humour could hinder one's faith journey. Pope Francis addressed power and authority with wit and humour, including his own position as the Pontiff. In one instance, he advised a young boy who aspired to be either a policeman or a Pope to consider the police force, joking that "anyone can become a pope, look at me!" Humour makes us grounded. It reminds us that none of us are indispensable. I need not be the last word, I too can make mistakes.

He Could Kneel Down

"Gestures speak louder than words." Kneeling is a gesture deeply embedded in religious traditions, signifying a range of spiritual attitudes including reverence, supplication, penance, and profound respect. Pope Francis knelt before prisoners, leaders, children, and even before street dogs. His kneeling was not just a symbol of humility, but a powerful act of non-threatening leadership, and a distinctive approach to papal ministry.

In April 2019, Pope Francis knelt and kissed the feet of each of the South Sudanese leaders: President Salva Kiir, his former deputy turned opposition leader Riek Machar, and three other vice presidents, to invigorate the country's fragile peace process. On Holy Thursday in March 2016, Pope Francis knelt to wash the feet of several refugees at the Center for Asylum Seekers in Castelnuovo

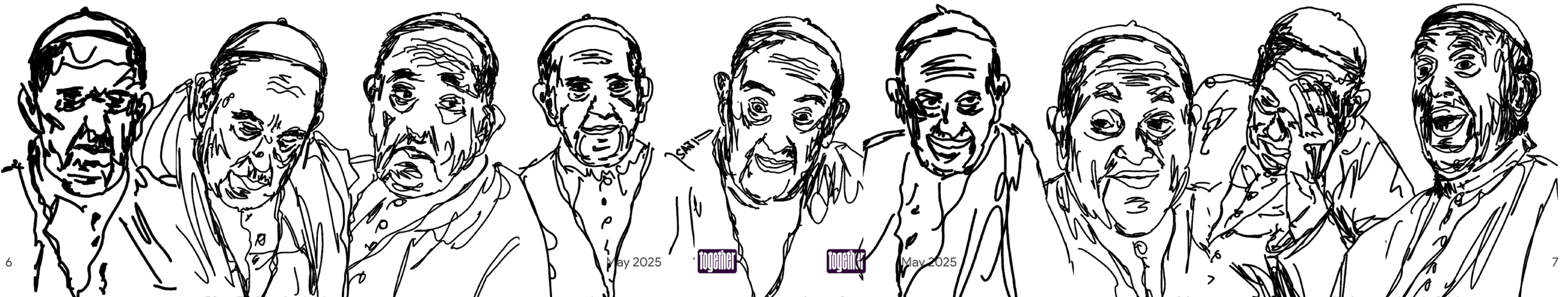
di Porto, near Rome. This diverse group included Muslims, Hindus, Copts, and Catholics, with reports specifying eight men and four women from various countries participating in the ritual.

He Could Ask Sorry

Pope Francis has made several significant apologies during his papacy, particularly concerning the Catholic Church's role in historical injustices. In 2022, Pope Francis undertook a 'penitential pilgrimage' to Canada, where he apologized for the Catholic Church's role in the residential school system. This system forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families and subjected them to abuse in church-run schools. He also acknowledged that the actions taken in the residential schools amounted to genocide.

Pope Francis, with deep distress, addressed the issue of clergy sexual abuse, acknowledging the Church's failures and expressing remorse for the suffering of victims. A significant turning point in his understanding of the abuse crisis came in 2018, after his visit to Chile, where he had to correct his previous statements, and then went on to take stronger action against those who had perpetrated and covered up the abuses.

It is important to understand that Pope Francis has worked to build a culture of accountability within the Catholic Church, and that his feeling with, his laughter, his stooping down, and apologies are part of that effort, and it has taken the Church miles farther.





Mercy Made Visible: The Life and Legacy of Pope Francis

Pope Francis' insistence on open dialogue, even in thorny matters like divorce or gender identity, reflected his belief in pastoral discernment and the primacy of conscience.

BIJU MADATHIKUNNEL CSSR

On 13 March 2013, following the historic resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina was elected as the 266th pope of the Catholic Church. His election was marked by many firsts: the first Jesuit pope, the first from the Americas, and the first to take the name Francis—in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi, the saint of peace, humility, and care for creation. This marked a significant shift in the Church's tone—away from privilege and towards simplicity, mercy, and engagement with the margins.

The date of his election—13/3/13—sparked curiosity and speculation due to its numerical symmetry. While the number 13 is often seen as unlucky in Western superstition, Pope Francis redefined it with grace. In fact, March 13, 2020, another Friday the 13th, was when the world entered a critical phase of the COVID-19 pandemic—a moment that would later highlight Pope Francis's pastoral leadership amid global crisis.

I vividly remember that day. Expecting an announcement, I made my way to Saint Peter's Basilica with a friend. Personally, I was nearing the end of my Master's studies and wrestling with questions about the Church's institutional relevance, clericalism, and the faith crisis affecting many. When the white smoke rose and the bells of Saint Peter's rang out, joy rippled through the crowd. When Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran announced 'Franciscus', there was a reverent pause, then waves of surprise. But what touched me most was his first gesture—not addressing the crowd with grandeur, but bowing his head and asking for the people's blessing. It was as though the Holy Spirit whispered hope into the Church again. My doubts dissolved.

Since then, I have had the rare privilege of meeting Pope Francis twice after our Redemptorist General Chapters. The first meeting was personal and informal, revealing his warmth, humour, and spontaneous affection. The second was during a formal address, where he encouraged us to read the signs of the times and boldly reimagine our mission in the context of today's wounded world.

Pope Francis' humility became evident through simple, meaningful acts. In 2013 alone, he washed the feet of prisoners and migrants during Holy Thursday Mass; carried his own briefcase during a papal trip to Rio; embraced Vinicio Riva, a man with neurofibromatosis, in a deeply human and healing moment; welcomed a child who ran onto the stage during a public event; and celebrated his birthday with the homeless. These weren't staged moments—they were natural expressions of a shepherd truly among his people.

In April 2019, a remarkable scene unfolded at the Vatican during a spiritual retreat for South Sudanese leaders. After days of prayer and dialogue, Pope Francis stunned

the world by kneeling and kissing the feet of President Salva Kiir and opposition leaders, including Riek Machar. It was an unprecedented gesture of humility, echoing Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet. His message was clear: political power must bow before the call to peace and reconciliation. It was one of the most Christ-like public actions of his papacy, deeply rooted in servant leadership.

The writings of Pope Francis reflect a shepherd's heart and a reformer's urgency. His first major document, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), reorients the Church toward joy, mission, and a spirit of evangelisation that includes rather than excludes. His encyclical *Laudato Si'* became a landmark in the global conversation on climate justice and integral ecology, calling for an 'ecological conversion.' *Fratelli tutti*, another key document, expanded the Church's social vision to include fraternity, solidarity, and peace across all divides.

When asked about gay individuals seeking God, he replied, 'Who am I to judge?' While maintaining traditional teachings, he emphasised respect, accompaniment, and inclusion. This pastoral stance helped many feel seen by the Church, without fear of exclusion.

One of his most personal and accessible writings is *The Name of God is Mercy*. Through a series of conversations with journalist Andrea Tornielli, Pope Francis shares theological reflections and pastoral anecdotes centred around God's endless compassion. He describes the Church as a 'field hospital'—called not to judge, but to heal wounds. For him, mercy is not a side note in Christian life—it is its beating heart.

His non-judgmental attitude, especially in matters concerning same-sex relationships, drew both praise and critique. When asked about gay individuals seeking God, he replied, 'Who am I to judge?' While maintaining traditional teachings, he emphasised respect, accompaniment, and inclusion. This pastoral stance helped many feel seen by the Church, without fear of exclusion. It reflected his broader vision of a Church that prioritises love over legalism and listening over pronouncement.

Over the years, Pope Francis introduced bold reforms that touched almost every level of ecclesial life. His apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* in 2022 restructured the Roman Curia, streamlining Vatican departments and shifting the focus towards evangelisation and pastoral care. The financial sector saw major efforts at transparency and ethical management. He addressed the sexual abuse crisis with the landmark document *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, holding bishops accountable and lifting the veil of secrecy in abuse investigations.

Francis did not merely restructure governance—he reimagined it. Through the *Synod on Synodality*, he opened pathways for laity and women to participate in Church discernment processes, challenging hierarchical rigidity. He called for a Church that listens, walks with its people, and is unafraid of uncomfortable questions. His insistence on open dialogue, even in thorny matters like divorce or gender identity, reflected his belief in pastoral discernment and the primacy of conscience.

In 2018, he made a significant doctrinal shift by revising the Catechism of the Catholic Church to declare the death penalty ‘inadmissible’ under any circumstance, citing the dignity of the human person. He also suggested adding ‘ecological sins’ to Catholic moral teaching, underscoring that care for creation is a moral and spiritual duty, not just a political concern.

Francis was a student of Church history and doctrine. Inspired by thinkers like St. John Henry Newman, he advocated for the ‘development of doctrine’—not changing core dogma, but deepening its understanding in light of changing contexts. This vision allowed for compassionate pastoral responses to complex realities without compromising truth.

Critics sometimes mistook his openness for doctrinal compromise. But Pope Francis consistently reaffirmed his grounding in Catholic tradition. As he said, ‘The Word of God is not a museum piece. It is a dynamic reality.’ He called the Church to interpret timeless truths with the eyes and heart of the Good Shepherd.

As of March 2025, Pope Francis completed 12 years as pope—a milestone rich in biblical symbolism. The number 12 represents completeness and divine authority: 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 gates of the heavenly city. His 12-year papacy marks a period of remarkable transformation: spiritual, pastoral, and institutional.

Throughout his journey, he remained a pope of the people—seen not only in his travels and homilies, but in his simple presence, genuine smiles, and deep silences. His outreach to the poor, his concern for migrants, his passionate pleas for peace, and his prophetic calls for ecological and social justice showed a Gospel lived with authenticity.

On Easter Monday of 2025, as the Church celebrated the joy of the Resurrection, the world

received the news of his passing. Pope Francis died peacefully, leaving behind a Church more compassionate, more courageous, and more connected to the cries of humanity. His death on such a sacred day felt providential—as if the Risen Lord welcomed home one of his most faithful servants.

Pope Francis’ legacy is not confined to policies or publications. It is etched in the hearts of millions who felt seen, healed, and challenged by him. He reminded us that the Church is not an institution of rules, but a community of grace. He led not as a monarch, but as a shepherd—close to the flock, bearing their burdens, and pointing them always to Jesus, the face of mercy. Indeed, through him, mercy was made visible.

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On Easter Monday of 2025, as the Church celebrated the joy of the Resurrection, the world received the news of his passing. Pope Francis died peacefully, leaving behind a Church more compassionate, more courageous, and more connected to the cries of humanity.

Thank You, Holy Father Pope Francis

He exuded joy, was friendly and approachable, and showed a sincere interest in the world around him.

LALITHA THOMAS SJT

Pope Francis passed away just as he lived, participating in the joyful celebration of Jesus’ resurrection on Easter. Throughout his life, he shared a message of hope, leaving it to us to continue that mission of hope.

Having journeyed closely with the Pope as a companion on our synodal journey, I am overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. God chose him as the shepherd of the Church, entrusting him with the keys of mercy and compassion—a merciful reflection of the Father. His gentle guidance inspires us to live more deeply in love and service.



With a trusting gaze on the people of God, Pope Francis began the synodal journey, welcoming us to participate in consultation, dialogue, deliberations, and discernment in the Holy Spirit. I had the privilege of participating alongside him in the Synod on Synodality at the Vatican, an experience that allowed me to meet the Holy Father in person and hear his insights multiple times. His enduring presence fostered deep encounters with Christ and left a profound impact on me. He was a simple, humble man—affectionate, warm, and attentive. Every time I saw him, I was reminded of his *Evangelii Gaudium*, which encourages us to be joyful disciples. He exuded joy, was friendly and approachable, and showed a sincere interest in the world around him.

In the Synod, Pope Francis, like other participants, was seated at a round table—a truly inspiring gesture. I had several

conversations with him, which were blessed moments during my Synod experience. Each encounter, from greeting to deeper conversation, renewed and refreshed me, filling me with joy and wonder at the man of God he is.

The first time I greeted him, I spontaneously said, “I love you very much, Pope.” He responded with childlike joy, embracing each of us as brother, friend, and Papa Francis. He listened attentively and patiently. While people waited long hours in queues to catch a glimpse of him, I was fortunate to spend a month in his presence. What a joy that was! Many times, I sat silently before him, yet he began conversations, asking about my congregation and ministry. I truly see the face of Christ in him. His encouragement and deep listening embodied a father’s love; we are indeed blessed.

Pope Francis has instilled a new sense of what it means to be Church, transitioning from “We the Church” to “We are the Church,” a collaborative and co-responsible approach.

I expressed gratitude for including women in the Synod, allowing us a voice and the opportunity to vote. He acknowledged the role of women as missionaries, consistently conveying the message, “Have courage, keep moving forward.” This ignited a fire of hope within me, inspiring me as a woman of hope to nurture a church that is inclusive, participative, and open to everyone.

Pope Francis has instilled a new sense of what it means to be Church, transitioning from “We the Church” to “We are the Church,” a collaborative and co-responsible approach. He has given a new face to the Church, identifying it as the Church of the poor. He hued closely to the marginalised, the imprisoned, the abused, migrants, and refugees, standing alongside them. His simple, humble life is deeply human and approachable, conveying palpable spiritual depth. His availability is evident

in his punctuality and readiness to greet and listen, fostering belonging, respect, and being heard.

His homilies are relevant, relatable—simple yet profoundly deep—bringing us closer to God and encouraging personal encounters with Jesus. Pope’s homily at the concluding Mass on October 29, 2023, had a significant impact, emphasizing the mission of loving God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). He urged us to channel this momentum through adoration and service, reiterating that love is central to our being: “Let us adore the Lord! Only in this way will we turn to Jesus, not ourselves.” Silent adoration allows the Word of God to live in our words, and in His presence, we are purified, transformed, and renewed by the fire of His Spirit.

Pope Francis calls us to embrace synodality, fostering a vibrant, trusting, and missionary Church in these changing times. This involves actively listening to the Holy Spirit, working together, and recognizing the value of every individual within the Church. While we may have many ideas for reforming the Church, he taught us that the great, perennial reform is to adore God and love our brothers and sisters with His love. Our primary focus must be to refocus our gaze on

God, becoming a Church that looks mercifully upon humanity—being a worshipping Church and a Church of service, washing the feet of wounded humanity, accompanying the frail and marginalised, and lovingly encountering the poor. It means building a civilisation of love—united and fraternal, listening and dialoguing, blessing and encouraging, welcoming and inclusive.

As a man of discernment, he taught us the importance of listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other; the spirituality of listening is becoming a way of life. Through conversation in the Spirit, he brought us together as friends able to sit around the table as people of God.

I am deeply thankful for the collective dream we have embarked upon with this living saint, who recognised the Spirit’s work and called us to be ambassadors of synodality. The Synod was truly an extraordinary experience, with the Holy Spirit guiding us toward unity. The Synod on Synodality stands as a tremendous gift to the Church under Pope Francis’s leadership. This synodal journey invites all baptised individuals to collaborate, share, and listen, voicing their hopes and dreams for the Church. The aim of the synod was not to create documents but to sow dreams, foster

trust, and kindle hope. In essence, synodality represents the journey of Christians walking together with Christ toward God’s Kingdom, in communion with all humanity.

Pope Francis has been a great pastor, spiritual guide, and friend. His humility and compassion for the poor promote inclusion and social justice. He encouraged interreligious dialogue and openness. As a reformer, he focused on transparency and accountability, inspiring closer relationships

with God. His empathy is immense, and he faced challenges with courage, sustaining a vision of an open and welcoming Church.

When I received the news about Pope Francis, I wept, feeling as though I had lost a father. I miss him deeply. During the second phase of the synod in October 2024, my heart whispered that I might not see him again, which is why I sought every opportunity to be close to him. My solace now comes from the knowledge that he is with God, serving as a powerful intercessor for us in heaven. He was truly a shepherd who “smelled like the sheep,” embodying the essence of a true shepherd in our time.

As I reflect on his Easter blessing, delivered despite his evident illness, it felt as though he was bidding us farewell. What a life! Like Jesus, he loved us until the very end.

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)? Dear Pope, you have shown us the way, your life stands as testament to all. Pray that we be moved by an “endless desire to show mercy and compassion.” Thank you and Love You Pope Francis till we meet in heaven!!

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Synodality represents the journey of Christians walking together with Christ toward God’s Kingdom, in communion with all humanity.

Francis, the Pope of the Poor

MARTÍN CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ OFM

“Hagan lío!” (Make a mess!), to shake things up—and in doing so, awaken the Church to a more vibrant, dynamic, and missionary presence in the world —Pope Francis during the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro.



Over the twelve years of his pontificate, I have followed his Magisterium with profound interest and admiration. His teachings have deeply inspired my intellectual and academic work, a commitment which I have reflected in thirty books and over a hundred articles.

Key Milestones of His Pontificate

In exercising his Magisterium, Pope Francis has sought not to impose doctrines, but rather to initiate processes that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, continue to mature within the People of God.

He chose the name Francis because he wanted to emulate the saint of Assisi in his unconditional openness to all people and all creatures. “Go and repair my Church.” With that call in mind, he embraced Sister Mother Earth and opened wide the doors of the Church to the marginalised and excluded.

A synodal Church open to all: Through various synods — on the Family (2014–2015), the Amazon (2019), and Synodality (2021–2024) — he emphasised the importance of listening, collaboration, and shared

decision-making between the faithful, the college of bishops, and the Bishop of Rome: We must all sit down to listen to one another (FT 48); “all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” Remarkably, he refrained from silencing even the harshest criticisms directed at him from within the Church.

He also convened the Synod on Youth (2018), reinforcing a message first delivered during the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro: “Hagan lío!” (Make a mess!), to shake things up—and in doing so, awaken the Church to a more vibrant, dynamic, and missionary presence in the world.

As a true pontifex (bridge-builder), he promoted dialogue at every levels. On February 4, 2019, commemorating the 800th anniversary of St. Francis’ encounter with the Sultan, he co-signed the Document on Human Fraternity with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi.

Shepherds with the “smell of the sheep”: A synodal Church requires “shepherds with the smell of the sheep,” who inspire, encourage, and walk with the faithful. To this end, Pope Francis promoted a reform of ecclesial leadership rooted in humility and service. The Pope, he said, does not stand alone above the church,” but he is “within it as a

baptised person among the baptised and in the episcopal college as a bishop among bishops.” He himself used to ask humbly for prayers and chose to live simply in the modest residence of Santa Marta.

He frequently reminded bishops that they are both teachers and disciples. At times, they “will have to walk after” the people “allowing the flock to strike out on new paths” (EG 31). During the Amazon Synod, he invited indigenous peoples — and all of us — to take co-responsibility for the life of local churches.

A Church that is poor and for the poor: “How I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor,” he exclaimed at the outset of his papacy. With this goal in mind, he initiated significant reforms, including the restructuring of the Roman Curia, the creation of a Migrants Section within the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and prioritised financial transparency at the Vatican Bank (IOR).

While denouncing the “globalisation of indifference,” he proclaimed the Jubilee of Mercy (2015–2016) urging the Church to become a “field hospital” for the wounded, rather than a museum for saints, constantly going forth to the existential peripheries. He personally visited prisons, refugee camps, and impoverished regions.

On socio-economic issues, he criticised the technocratic paradigm and proposed an inclusive, ethical, and compassionate economy, inspired by St Francis of Assisi. In 2020, he convened an international gathering of young economists in Assisi, giving rise to the movement known as The Economy of Francesco.

Integral ecology: Hearing the cry of the earth: The human fraternity proposed in Fratelli tutti is intertwined with the cosmic fraternity developed in Laudato si’. Indeed, «everything is connected» (LS 91). His vision of integral ecology unites environmental protection with social justice and human dignity — for “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (LS 118).

One powerful moment of his pontificate came on March 27, 2020, in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Alone in a rain-soaked and empty St. Peter’s Square, he prayed: “We did not listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet... Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: ‘Wake up, Lord!’”

My Personal Experience with Pope Francis

On March 13, 2006, I had the privilege of meeting him in Buenos Aires, while he served as Archbishop of the city. I was there conducting an official visit to renew the affiliation of a theological institute (ITF). After meeting with the bishop of the Diocese of Merlo-Moreno (under his metropolitan jurisdiction), I greeted him personally.

I had already heard much about his deep pastoral commitment to the poor: how he had established new parishes and promoted educational programmes in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, while speaking out against the harmful effects of neoliberal policies. I still treasure the homily he gave that day.

I cherish three particular meetings with him as Pope: On September 20, 2013, I presented him with one of my books on economics. With his characteristic warmth, he flipped through its pages attentively as I explained its contents. We also reminisced about our earlier encounter in Buenos Aires.

On February 9, 2019, during a gathering organised by the Alphonsian Academy, I presented him with nine more of my books. While he was delivering his address to the whole assembly, he paused, looked up, and encouraged us to raise awareness about the seriousness of ecological sin. That spontaneous remark moved me deeply, as I had emphasised that very issue in several of my own publications.

Then, on March 23, 2023, I brought him 12 more books of mine. His health had visibly declined, yet his spirit remained full of humour and warmth. After examining the first six volumes, he smiled and teased me: “Do you write also during the night?”

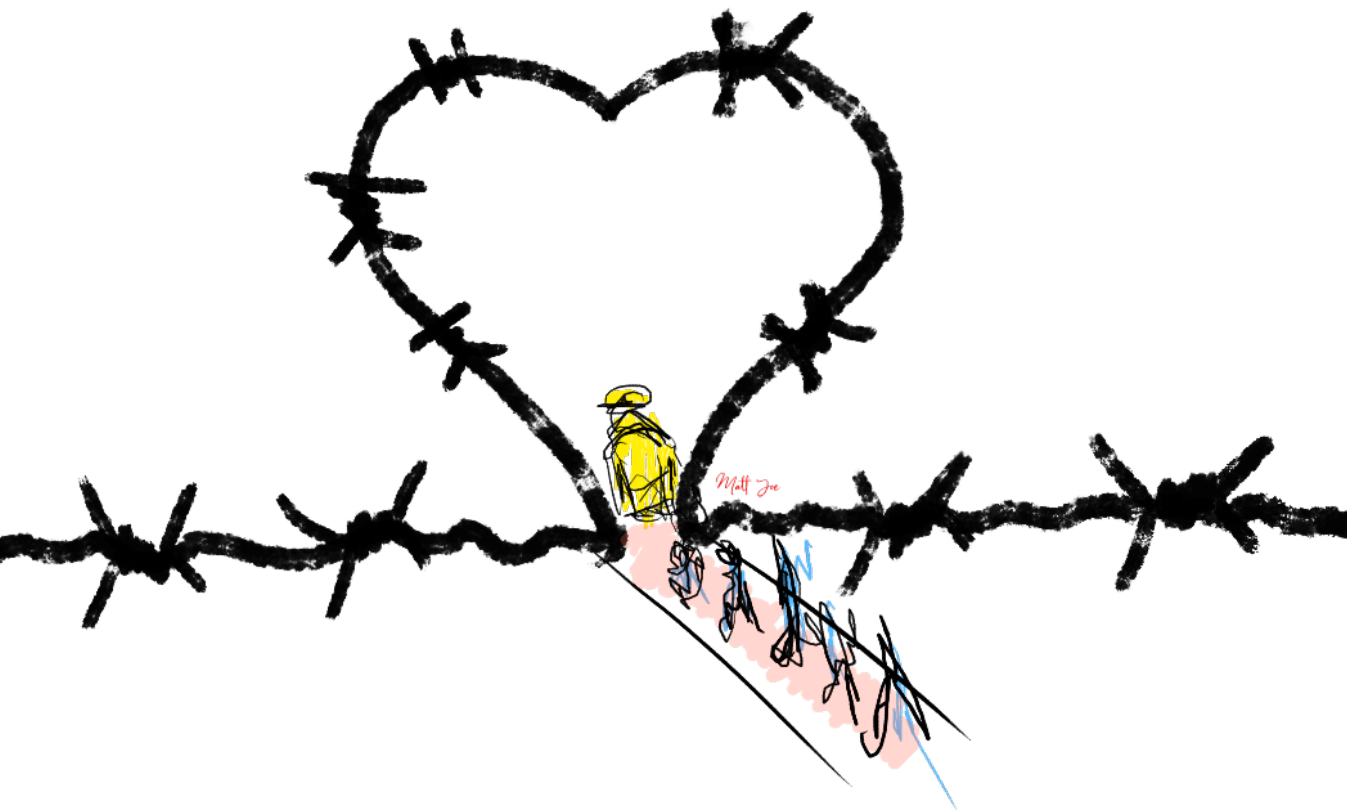
Each time I greeted him, he radiated that same disarming humanity—simple, welcoming, and deeply pastoral—the very kind of presence he longed to see in the leaders of the Church.

On October 3, 1226, Saint Francis of Assisi chose to die lying naked on the bare ground, blessing his brothers as they sang the Canticle of the Creatures. Eight centuries later, the Pope who took his name also requested to be buried in a simple coffin, laid directly on the earth, without any elaborate adornments. He passed away shortly after offering his final Urbi et Orbi blessing to the world.

Now that he has returned to the Father’s house, I feel a deep sense of loss— yet also a joyful certainty that his spirit continues to lead us. He opened new paths and directed our gaze toward luminous horizons. Along these paths, we now journey together as a Church and as a cosmic family.

Let us keep dreaming with him of a more fraternal world, one that listens to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Let us keep building a synodal Church that is always “going forth” toward the peripheries, guided by pastors who, like him, carry the “smell of the sheep.” Let us not lose hope. The Pope who so often asked for our prayers now intercedes for us.

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“I Don’t Want to Be an Ice Cream Seller”

Pope Francis preferred to work away patiently at building consensus and accommodating a variety of perspectives.

ALEX TUSCANO

During Bergoglio’s time as the provincial of the Jesuit society, the entire Latin America or South America was going through profound struggles. While the people had voted for socialist governments, the United States of America considered these governments as threats to their economy. There were constant attacks on countries like Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Chile, and Argentina. In both Chile and Argentina, the United States of America, through the CIA, brought down democratically elected Democratic Socialist governments and imposed military dictatorships.

In most of these countries, there was widespread resistance from the people. Christians tried to find a new message in the Gospel, relevant to their struggle for justice. This did not go well with the conservative and pro-military official church. During this period, several radical theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez came up with “Liberation Theology.” This gave light and strength to the people in their struggle against the imperialists who were depriving the poor of their livelihood and right to life. Bishop Romero openly took a stand against the military dictatorship. He was shot dead while offering Mass.

Fr Bergoglio was the provincial of the Jesuits during this period of military dictatorship in Argentina. Between 1976 and 1983, between 15,000 and 30,000 Argentines “disappeared” or were killed. The entire official Church and its religious orders were divided on how to react to events. The official Church, the conservatives, secretly supported the abuses of human rights. The progressive elements were opposed to the dictatorship. There were also radicals who came out and openly challenged the Military Junta. These included priests and religious.

There were rumors around the time of papal elections, both in 2005 and 2013, that back in 1976 Francis had failed to help two priests in their hour of need. Contrary to these rumors, as provincial, he had confronted Jorge Videla and Emilio Massera, two of the three leaders of the military junta, and got the priests released after five months in captivity, blindfolded and handcuffed.

He had helped to smuggle out of Argentina those whom the military junta sought to arrest. In one case, he had given a young Uruguayan man his own identity card to aid his escape. One of his biographers, the journalist Paul Vallely, suggested that, in reflecting during this period of exile on his own record under the junta, Francis experienced a road to Damascus moment, and thereafter became a more radical, fearless, and outspoken priest.

In 1992, the Jesuits asked Bergoglio not to live in the Jesuit residence due to tensions with the leaders and scholars over Catholic orthodoxy and liberation theology. There was a bishop by the name of Podesta. He was suspended as he opposed the Argentine revolutionary military dictatorship. He later married, and his wife was attacked for her marriage to Podesta. Archbishop Bergoglio defended Podesta’s wife.

On June 3, 1998, as Archbishop, he established parishes to increase Catholic presence among slum dwellers. He was even called the “slum Bishop.” Archbishop Bergoglio realised that he had not played the role that was required by the situation in Argentina—resistance to repression under the dictatorship of the military Junta and support for the people’s struggle for justice and democracy. During the period of the Dirty War, the rule of

the military dictatorship, the Church should have stood with the people in their struggle. But the Church was divided. Considering the role the Catholic Church played during the Dirty War, he appealed to the Catholic Church saying “the Argentine Catholic Church needs to put on garments of public penance for the sins committed during the years of the dictatorship in the 1970s.” The Pope experienced the pain of those memories, “a thorn in his flesh,” which would seem to have lasted a lifetime. He said on more than one occasion, “the truth is that I’m a sinner” and that as provincial he had had to learn from “my errors along the way.”

The majority of cardinals who gathered in the Sistine Chapel to vote were looking for something more than (relative) youth. Top of their agenda as they assembled was openness to fresh thinking. They surprised everyone by opting for Catholicism’s first Jesuit Pope, the first Latin American successor to Saint Peter, and first leader from outside Europe in over a millennium.

Immediately, Bergoglio signaled unambiguously that he intended to be a different kind of pope, one for the 21st century. He boldly chose to be known as Francis, becoming the first pontiff to take on the name of the radical saint from Assisi who had turned his back on privilege and status in this world, and lived with and for the poor. No more pomp and ceremony, the new pope seemed to be saying, sleeves rolled up and joining the fight for social and economic justice, “I don’t want to be an ice cream seller.”

Smiling winningly, Francis described himself as an outsider, someone “from the end of the world,” who wanted to “walk together and work together” with the crowds who greeted him, rather than tell them what to do. This personal modesty never wavered in all his years in Rome. He picked up his own phone, he stood in a queue for his food, shunned limos and preferred to walk if possible. On the day after his election, he slipped away on foot to collect his suitcase and settle the bill at the modest pensione where he had been booked in before the conclave began. If it had to be four wheels, he took a bus, or frequently squeezed his bulky frame into the papal Fiat 500 saloon.

His biographer Austen Ivereigh wrote, “Bergoglio was a once-in-a-generation combination of two qualities seldom found together. He had the political genius of a charismatic leader and the prophetic holiness of a desert saint.” He insisted that Catholicism would henceforth be “a poor church for the poor,” and returned time and again in his pronouncements to the need to close the economic gap between developed and developing nations.

In an interview with his friend Abraham Skorka, an Argentinian rabbi, he said, “the attitude we must have towards the poor is, in its essence, that of true commitment. This commitment must be person to person, in the flesh. It is not enough to mediate this through institutions... They do not excuse us from our obligation of establishing personal contact with the needy.” The new cardinal was no theologian—his approach was more homespun—but his commitment to poor people was every bit as strong as that of the liberation theologians. He would simply say he did what the Jesus of the gospels told him to do.

For Francis, climate change, migration, and global poverty were interconnected. He did not believe in the trickle-down theory of economy. Capitalism promotes consumerism, and in a greed for profit, destroys the environment and causes climate change. In his first pastoral visit outside Rome following his election, in July 2013, he traveled to the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa off the coast of North Africa to meet the migrants and refugees who were arriving there in ever-greater numbers. With European governments keen only to find ways of “sending them back,” Francis spoke out against such “global indifference” to their plight, and called for a “reawakening of conscience” in wealthy nations. Pope Francis was opposed to the death penalty. He strongly believed that love and compassion should run in our veins. Only forgiveness and reconciliation will give hope and make the world sustainable.

It was a crusade that saw him take a leading role in tackling the challenges faced by a warming planet, castigating and repeatedly reminding the politicians who refused to grasp the threat posed to the future of humanity by climate change. When Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, had made it plain that he was happy to see the rainforest go up in flames, Francis’s response was to use the papacy’s glob-

al reach to give voice to the fears of the 33 million people living in the Amazon basin who felt themselves to be powerless in shaping their own and the planet’s future. At the gathering, the crimes and injustice meted out by politicians and multinationals were called out as destructive of livelihoods as well as of Earth’s greatest store of carbon.

His May 2015 encyclical, ‘Laudato Si’ (Praise Be to You), an impassioned cry of pain at what was happening to the Earth and especially to its poorest, most vulnerable inhabitants because climate change was going unchecked, was read widely outside the usual Catholic circles. It is held by many experts to have galvanised those who gathered in Paris at the end of that year to set a target of limiting global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees.

Francis preferred to work away patiently at building consensus and accommodating a variety of perspectives. To that end, he breathed new life into the system of regular gatherings—or synods—of bishops in Rome to debate pressing matters. Francis was at pains to listen and act, going so far in 2023 as to call a curiously named synod on synodality in his anxiety to make the process work better as a conduit between the center and the outposts of his global church. It was part of turning the usual church structures upside down—he, the outsider in Vatican terms, promoting other outsiders to high office.

He made good on his promise to promote more women to leading roles in the Vatican, but still they remain shut out of priesthood. “The church is female—it is not male,” he wrote in his 2025 autobiography, entitled *Hope*. “We clerics are males but we are not the church. The church is female because she is the bride.”

Francis’s vision of his role as pope was that of the servant leader, both inside the church and out, starting always with those at the very bottom and offering them practical help, while also challenging on a bigger stage the reasons why they were in such need in a wealthy world. Early in his pontificate, he told his priests to get out of their churches and onto the streets, as he himself had in Buenos Aires, rather than restrict their ministry to those who filled the pews. Pope Francis struggled to make the Church a church of Love, Compassion, and Service to the poor.

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P⊕PE FRANCIS —A FRANCISCAN REV⊕LU+I⊕NARY

JOY PRAKASH OFM



About half a century ago, a fellow Jesuit by name Mario von Galli SJ, wrote a book entitled *Living Our Future: Francis of Assisi and the Church Tomorrow*. What he says about St. Francis of Assisi, could be applied to Pope Francis. He says, “It has become the order of the day to connect the words “Christian” and “revolutionary”, “revolution” and “Christianity” with one another. For many, of course, that is still a taboo. For centuries it was impossible for a Christian to be a revolutionary. He could not be revolutionary in the temporal sphere because the reigning authority has been established by the grace of God and the resultant regime as sacred. He could not be a revolutionary because the Church had been founded by God himself”

With Jorge Mario Bergoglio becoming the pope, the Church’s vocation to live the Gospel of Jesus became a revolution itself! Pope Francis not only took the name “Francis” for himself but made the Franciscan outlook and way of life as the lasting theme of his papacy. Laurentius Casutt speaks about the Rules that St. Francis wrote, “Just as the gospel can hardly be called a law book, so Francis did not want to leave a legal commentary to his friars. Laws need not necessarily stand in the way of the spirit, but they often do, the saint knew this. He knew even better the legal norms are superfluous to a large extent where a living, holy spirit is active” Weren’t these the heart-concern of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope?

More than any other reform-minded saint, St Francis of Assisi brought his life and vision closer to the Gospel. Father Lippert SJ, who lived a century ago, clarifies this: “The organisational principle which leads from Benedict through Dominic and Ignatius to the newer communities seems to have practically exhausted its inner possibilities.... The fundamental newness which is precisely the thing being sought today by countless souls...is to be found only along a completely different line: along the line of the original ideal of Francis. In other words: in the direction of a freely chosen life style and freely chosen bonds of love; in the direction of a life that operates through spontaneous initiative of the self rather than through great constructs of the will; in the direction of a truly living and individual personality shaped by its own inner laws and standards. If God should someday deign to reveal the Order of the future to his Church...it will surely bear the stamp of Francis’ soul and spirit.”

No wonder Pope Francis’ papacy had the stamp of St. Francis’ soul and spirit in his personal life and mission, in his thought (*Laudato si’*, *Fratelli tutti*, and *Joy of the Gospel*) and vision,” “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.” Pope Francis famously expressed these words, shortly after becoming the Pope in 2013.

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Pope Francis—the Choice of Name Was No Accident

Pope Francis consistently drew inspiration from the founder of the Franciscans, seeing in Francis a prophet of change, a man of compassion, and a model for the world today.

AROKIAM JOHN OFM

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the first Jesuit and the first Latin American (from Argentina) to be elected as the 266th Pope of the Catholic Church, surprised the whole world by being the first Pope to be named after Saint Francis of Assisi. He himself testified that he chose the name Francis as “the inspirational ideal of my pontificate”, embracing Saint Francis as “the model of his pontificate.” Pope Francis consistently drew inspiration from the founder of the Franciscans, seeing in Francis a prophet of change, a man of compassion, and a model for the world today — especially for young people, irrespective of faith, religion, nationality, gender, age, or race.



When I received the sad news of the sudden death of Pope Francis, I was serving as an Extraordinary Confessor at the Papal Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome. Alongside my duties as a professor at the Pontifical Antonianum University, I had been assigned there in obedience to the Franciscan Minister General, in response to a request from the Apostolic Penitentiary for friars to serve as Extraordinary Confessors during the Holy Year 2025. This ministry, which entails administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation and helping penitents to encounter the mercy of God, echoes the spirit of the Year of Mercy (2015) proclaimed by Pope Francis, and continues through the Jubilee or Holy Year (2025). In his bull of induction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, the Holy Father explicitly recalls the contribution of his namesake, Francis of Assisi: “Even earlier, in 1216, Pope Honorius III granted Francis for an indulgence for all those visiting the Porziuncola on the first two days of August” (*Spes non Confundit* 5). This indulgence is known as “the Pardon of Assisi”. Pardon or Mercy, born of *minoritas* (Minority), highlights a key aspect essential to understanding the Gospel experience of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Pontificate of Pope Francis. As Andrea Tornielli, Editorial Director of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Communication, rightly observed: “If there is a message that has most characterised Pope Francis’ pontificate and is destined to remain, it is that of mercy.”

Inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato si’*, a powerful document on Care for the Environment and the promotion of Integral Ecology. It has been praised as “the most important intellectual critique of our time.” In it, the Pope wrote: “If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realise that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings,

life, society and our relationship with nature.” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, 215).

With his deep Franciscan sensitivity, Pope Francis also authored another major encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, in which he emphasized the importance of human fraternity and social friendship. Drawing on the spiritual legacy of Saint Francis of Assisi, “the saint of fraternal love,” he sought to inspire political leaders around the world to take action grounded in solidarity. The Pope of Fraternal love and Peace also highlighted the vital role of religions in building peace.

In a letter of condolence following the death of Pope Francis, Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Jesuits, spoke of “Francis, the Pope who always urged us to serve the ‘crucified’ in the world”. When the Holy Father meditated on the Crucified Lord and the cry of the crucified in the world, his mind and heart once again recalled Francis of Assisi. Br. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM, the Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, in his letter on the occasion of the death of Pope Francis, reiterated at the very beginning of his reflection: “His (Pope Francis’) choice of name was not a simple homage to St Francis of Assisi, but an actual programme for his life and his pontificate — a return to the marrow of the Gospel that so char-

acterised the path of the Poverello.” In fact, in the final meditation and prayers for the Via Crucis 2025 written by the Pope and prayed at the Colosseum on April 18, 2025, Pope Francis concluded the reflections by once again recalling his namesake’s prayers and admonitions. He interwove them with a quote from the Encyclical *Letter Dilexit* Nos—where, though he did not explicitly mention Saint Francis of Assisi, his spirit is clearly present. The Holy Father knew well that the Saint, moved by contemplation of the Crucifixion, would weep and lament, exclaiming, “Love is not loved”. Pope Francis began the Way of the Cross meditation with the words: “The road to Calvary passes through the streets we tread each day”, and he concluded

Inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato si’*, a powerful document on Care for the Environment and the promotion of Integral Ecology.

it with references to Saint Francis' writings: "‘Laudato si, mi’ Signore’ — ‘Praise be to you, my Lord.’ In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister... This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her" (Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 1-2).

"‘Fratelli tutti.’ With these words, Saint Francis addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel" (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 1). "He loved us, Saint Paul says of Christ... in order to make us realise that nothing can ever ‘separate us’ from that love" (Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, 1).

We have walked the Stations of the Cross. We have turned towards the love from which nothing can ever separate us. Now, as the King sleeps and a great silence descends upon all the earth, let us pray, in the words of Saint Francis, for the gift of heartfelt conversion:

Most High and glorious God,
Cast your light into the darkness of my heart.
Grant me right faith,
firm hope,
perfect charity,
and profound humility.
Grant me, Lord, wisdom and understanding,
so that I may do your true and holy will. Amen.

Grazie, Santo Padre (Thank you, Holy Father), for your Franciscanism imbued with the fragrance of the Gospel, expressed through both paternal and maternal care and concern for the least among us. Grazie, Santo Padre, for inspiring me to write the book *From Francis of Assisi to Pope Francis: Franciscan Spirituality Today* (2019), which concluded with a chapter recounting my personal encounter with you on Historical Franciscan Day, 23rd November 2017, as the Franciscan family celebrated two significant anniversaries in our history — the 8th centenary of the *Pardon of Assisi* (2016) and the 5th centenary (2017) of the Bull *Ite vos* of Pope Leo X. When it was my turn to greet you—the 'Lord Pope', as Saint Francis would have said, with a grateful heart I expressed: "*Santo Padre, La ringrazio per i suoi messaggi e il suo esempio*," (which means, "Holy Father, thank

you for your messages and your example"). You smiled at me, and with special affection, held my hands. Then spontaneously, you responded: "*Grazie*" (Thank you!). This rare, unforgettable and emotional encounter has been a deep inspiration for me to engage myself in promoting the Franciscan charism and life on a global level, especially through the Franciscan Vision Global Summit (FVGS), as the Franciscan Family celebrates the Franciscan Centenary (2023-2026). This journey was in line with the publication of my book titled *Sparkling the Joy of Truth: Global compact on Education: Francis of Assisi – Mary of Nazareth – Pope Francis* (2020). Grazie, Santo Padre, for receiving these books and for graciously sending me, after each one, your appreciation and apostolic blessings through letters signed by Monsignor L. Roberto Cona, Assessor, on the official letterhead of the Secretariat of Vatican State.

In the true spirit of Saint Francis, just as the Portiuncula (the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi) became a symbol of the Saint's deep love for Mary, so too has the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome been for you, Holy Father, the symbol of your own love for the Blessed Virgin. As a Franciscan heart naturally turns to the maternal care of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, so too your life and death, your Magisterium and pontificate, have all been marked by a truly Marian heart, as your spiritual testament bears witness: "I have always entrusted my life and my priestly and episcopal ministry to the Mother of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, I ask that my mortal remains rest, awaiting the day of resurrection, in the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major. I wish my final earthly journey to end in this ancient Marian shrine, where I used to go to pray at the beginning and end of every Apostolic Journey, entrusting my intentions to the Immaculate Mother and thanking her for her gentle, maternal care."

Following the example of Pope Francis, let us also entrust ourselves to the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. With faith in the Risen Christ, may we strive to bring forth the hope of Easter, remembering the words of Pope Francis: "I want to say one thing: do not let anyone steal your hope!"

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St Ignatius, St Francis, and Pope Francis

TOM THOMAS



My world turned upside down on this Easter Monday. I received the news from a friend, an editor of a Catholic Online Publication, almost at the instant it was released—Pope Francis is no more. Since then, I experience a profound sadness in me, just like I experienced when I lost my father. It is the same for billions of Catholics all over the world, and for non Catholics too. Pope Francis was a leader from the heart. As a writer, I followed his various letters, communications and catechesis with great interest. They presented the Church teachings through a modern lens.

As details of Pope Francis' last testament and his typical day and last hours emerge, I am struck at how he has modelled his life on two of the greatest Saints to walk this earth – the founder of the Jesuit order to which Pope Francis belonged, St Ignatius of Loyola, and St Francis of Assisi, the beggar of Christ, founder of the Franciscans, whose name Francis took up. I have been blessed to be closely associated with these two great orders.

It was fascinating to note that a normal day in the life of Pope Francis began at 430 am with almost two hours dedicated to personal prayer, the examen and meditating on the day's Scriptures. Pope Francis would then make his way to the 7am Mass during which he would say a homily from the heart, and commence his busy day thereafter. Attending an Ignatian retreat recently made me familiar with the contemplative method of reading the scriptures that St Ignatius of Loyola followed and all Jesuits do. Pray, Prepare and Review. The Pray aspect would be reading the scripture a couple of times, Prayer would be contemplation of up to an hour, and Review would be writing down the points revealed in contemplation from two perspectives: What is God saying to me? What is my response to God's call?

This rock solid foundation every day in Scriptural study, contemplation and prayer, is what helped Pope Francis get through a very busy day. It is in fact a practise worthy of emulation, if we can reach out to God, instead of our mobile , for the first few hours of the day.

The Jesuits work all the time, and one of their founding principles is to be at the service of the Pope at all times. I was told by a senior Jesuit who I go to for Confession periodically, that St Ignatius worked till the very end of his life. Even in the last days, when he knew his life was ebbing away, he was focusing on building up of his order for the Lord, the Company of Jesus. He passed away without receiving the Blessing of the Pope or any last rites.

Coming to St Francis of Assisi, no other saint embraced poverty and simplicity in life as he did. A son of one of the wealthiest men in town, his conversion experience made him renounce everything, even the clothes that his earthly father provided. He embraced Lady Poverty with great love and embraced Sister Death. Whilst dying, asked his beloved brothers to lower him to the bare ground, without clothes and ended his life in a very simple manner, being buried near the chapel dedicated to Mother Mary. He died praising God and singing Psalms 41. It is remarkable that the order he founded, the Franciscans, follow to the letter the directives of St Francis to this day, and I witness this from my close association with the Franciscans.

I think the great influence of St Ignatius of Loyola and St Francis of Assisi on his life, is the reason that Pope Francis worked till the very last day of his life through the Easter Tridium, washing feet, addressing the faithful in the St Peter's Square, being driven in his beloved Popemobile and even receiving the US Vice President J D Vance. The

video and picture grabs from that last day shows he was clearly unwell, but he pushed through, for us, doing the work faithfully till the end that he was entrusted to do, just as St Ignatius did.

He also wanted a simple life as St Francis did, even in death. This is the reason Pope Francis wanted a simple burial, in a simple wooden cask in the papal Basilica of St Mary Major, giving up the pomp of a Papal Funeral, which would have had three nesting coffins made of cypress, lead and oak, besides other symbols including being buried in the Vatican grottos below St Peter's Basilica. He leaves this world and the Papacy as he started it, in simplicity and humility.

I look through what Pope Francis said on death, and this address seems apt: "Our whole life appears like a seed that will have to be buried so that its flower and its fruit can be born. It will be born, along with everything else in the world. Not without labor pains, not without pain, but it will be born. And the life of the risen body will be a hundred and a thousand times more alive than we have tasted it on this earth."

The words of St Francis of Assisi come to mind, as it seems to be the way that Pope Francis lived his life: "Keep a clear eye toward life's end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God's creature. What you are in his sight is what you are and nothing more. Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take nothing that you have received...but only what you have given; a full heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage."

I had prayed to see in person, even at a distance, Pope Francis in our country. Pope Francis' visit to our country would have surely built stronger bridges amongst us all. This is one prayer of mine that went unanswered.

Requiescat in Pace Franciscus.

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Pope Francis: The Human Face of God

This Pope was a bridge-builder and a demolisher of walls between religions and nations in order to establish dialogue and friendship.

GERRY LOBO OFM



Physical death is an inevitable reality for every living being on earth. The Redeemer of the human race, Jesus of Nazareth died, though it was inflicted on him by those who were threatened by his very person besides his prophetic stance towards evil done and spoken by religious heads. Emperors who ruled mightily also died. Trees die and ants die too. There is nothing strange that a Pope, a religious leader dies. Pope Francis, having served humanity for 12 years also died when his time on this earth had come. However, in his death, the world has not lost but gained a personality who truly penetrated the very mystery of life and quite specifically manifested through his service that life is for service and to live is to be a servant!

In our description of Pope Francis and what he stood for is not to weigh the ministry of service rendered by Popes in the Church prior to him. Indeed, every Pope, being very human, looked at the world and its people, situations and predicaments, wars and peace in their perspective and acted upon it. They deserve honour and appreciation for their very persons who had the courage to lead millions in the path of right and justice, faith and human well-being. Avoiding any kind of comparison between Popes, Pope Francis is to be highlighted for his very humanity which shone brightly on all without an iota of exaggerated glorification.

Pope Francis, the name he chose for himself when he was elected as the Servant of Servants, already indicated that what the world and the Church urgently needed was the humanity that was being tarnished by all kinds of human endeavors projected towards the three passions, namely, the passion for possessions, the passion for power, and the passion for honour which Jesus of Nazareth had vehemently crushed and brushed aside and that which a man of the 13th century, Francesco of Bernardone, had literally followed by way of making the Gospel of Christ a reality.

With the name, after the poor man of God, Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis set out not to demolish and rebuild humanity with a new face, but to restore the broken hearts, bones, and minds of people who, in their egotistic pursuits, had bruised and broken relationships of genuine concern for one another. Hence, he was interested not in innovation but renovation of creation and the human faces whose image could never be erased from that which the Creator had fashioned them with. Therefore, the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* spoke aloud the cry of mother earth, a mother languishing in the pangs of breathing and bearing.

The Pope could personally hear aloud the cry of mother earth; he could not have ignored it. His response to that cry of a mother for love was clearly enunciated in a powerful affective language in that outstanding document. Humans because of their greed continue to undermine and kill the legitimate life of all created beings. More and more this has diminished the vitality of the Earth, and humans themselves have suffered the negative consequences upon their day-to-day existence. The Pope lived with all creation and firmly believed that human beings would certainly vanish for the mere lack of breath which creatures freely provide and the water they supply for the thirsty. The document expressed not the sentimental spirituality of ecology which many brag about but a heart full of love with prophetic stance towards the harmony and well-being that creation needed to recover from her original face which the Creator had shared with her as we read in the *Book of Genesis*. The Pope demanded responsibility from those who make our laws and the scientific minds to maintain the goodness inherent in the Creatures. He was not concerned to pronounce dogmatic statements about creation and created realities that were the subject matter of his long Encyclical. He always spoke the language which people could be

The Pope lived with all creation and firmly believed that human beings would certainly vanish for the mere lack of breath which creatures freely provide and the water they supply for the thirsty.

enabled to grasp what he proclaimed either in documents or in his preachings. *Laudato Si'* was for every living person and to every living creature, a Cantic sung in popular tongue.

The plight of human beings was at the heart of Pope Francis. While often the papal statements were drowned in abstract concepts and unapproachable theological mysticism, Pope Francis touched down the common man and woman whose daily concerns were untouched. Returning to the wayfarer teachings of Jesus and his affinity to real human issues, the Pope addressed his deep concern towards fraternal bonds that have been broken, causing alienation and exclusion of a large section of human beings. His Encyclical *Fratelli*

tutti, You are all brothers, without mincing words was directed to the rulers of the world who were to be the guardians and protectors of human rights that were systematically violated in many ways. The Pope asked the whole world of human persons not to ask who is my neighbor but to ask oneself how one could be a neighbour to another on the road of Jerusalem to

Jericho of our everyday life and dealings with other human faces. A new kind of politics was required to bring fraternity with one another where one looks not for one's own success but one commits oneself to raise the fallen, bind up the broken and bring back the erring. Human fraternity is the strength of our universe. We need each other no matter what we carry with us in our background history. The Pope could not compromise with human dignity and he could not allow wars to perpetuate Gaza-like homicides on our earth. Hence he made consistent effort in addressing nations and their heads in asking that they be cautious in their warmongering minds. He spoke loud and strong in opposing practices and laws that delete moral, ethical values and thus blind the consciences of people only to gain fringe benefits in their favour.

Historically Popes ruled the Church as monarchs and distanced themselves from people, thus creating awe and fear around them so that the latter knew that the Popes are Vicars of God whose authority is directly from above. Pope Francis, with his Jesuit training and his experience with the downtrodden people of Argentina was deeply convinced that if there is a God, He can only be one who is seen, touched, and relished by people. With this thought Pope Francis saw that he was never above people or separated from them. He desired to walk on the same level ground with those

whose plight at times was a devastating experience for him. The thousands of children killed in Gaza were at the heart of this pope. Migrants and refugees were not alien to him. He walked with them offering space for their existence. Jesus never stood apart from people as a Holy of Holies and could never speak ill of them or look down on them. The Pope shared in the political holiness of Jesus and taught the politics of Jesus which leaders in the Church dared not do, considering it as a-theistic. That's why the words of Pope Francis were the speech of the illiterate but with empathetic compassion and authentic bearing.

Pope Francis was real. There was no artificial appearance around him. Perhaps he understood better than anyone that leadership is for service and that can only be exercised together WITH rather than in alienation from others. He understood that service is quite an ordinary practice which does not require to be wrapped up with dogmatic or scriptural statements. Preferring to remain an ordinary person in every aspect of life, Pope Francis showed to humanity the face of God today which was very much devoid of canonical rightness and traditional perpetuation. He lived conscientiously with his conscience and never feared his detractors, who were real. He showed the human face of God to a world which was not accustomed to such an ordinary Reality, and particularly to church-men and women for whom God could only be the Unseen mystery shown around much pomp and power, colour and decor. Perhaps, if there was one human person in our times who knew what he was meant to be, it could be no other than Pope Francis, the human face of God!

The world had established an affectionate rapport with Pope Francis because he spoke directly to the hearts of people who needed an abundance of understanding and compassion. This is not to say that he was all 'sweet and butter.' He also disturbed the consciences of even the lowly and the marginalised offering them a right direction. He did it all because he was madly interested in people, their joys and sorrows, hopes and anxieties. He could be a child with a child and student with a student in his approach and in the manner of relating to others. If the world at large loves him, it is because his heart was open to their cry.

In terms of certain matters of moral nature which bothered the conscience of people, the Pope did not remain with conventional solutions or pathways. Instead, he took the perspectives of Jesus and guided them bringing hope in their guilt-burdened lives. "Who am I to judge?" was his response when minds of critics were almost ready with indignation. All in all, Pope Francis departed from the position Popes before him had taken and from the manner in which

they conducted themselves in that position. He was not concerned about their rightness or wrongness but about the human heart gone lost on account of one's own inner disposition. Perhaps many in the Church which he shepherded disapproved of his conduct, while many others would certainly see in him a prophet who stood up for the unknown or the unheard of things. These latter ones would have certainly come to understand that religion was not rules and mere external practices but the decision to live newly and effect an influence on others towards a new outlook on life. Pope Francis thought and practiced what is of the here and now, of this flesh, this pain, this joy, and this sorrow where God was Real and the One who is truly on the side of the weak and falling flesh.

The Church leaders, in particular, at the death of Pope Francis pour forth emotional accolades about him and raise him to the skies. That as it may be deserving the man, what anyone needs to take home is to see in him a person who lived for others through his place as a leader of millions of followers. It is also pertinent that the example and the spirit he breathed must in some way be manifested in the lifestyle of his followers and of the Church leaders to begin with. That is where the Church of today can bear witness to the world of someone who two thousand years ago came to create a new earth and hoped for a new heaven. The institutional Church while continuing her ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must consciously guard itself of the trappings of power and know that the real use of power should be service or nothing at all.

This Pope was a bridge-builder and a demolisher of walls between religions and nations in order to establish dialogue and friendship. He never shied away from a Church on the street, a dirty street. His was not a religion of incense and offerings but a religion of human sensitivity and the offerings of the heart full of love. He understood himself as the Church and as the mission in the world different from the understanding of the Church as a magnificent structure of believers worshipping Jesus Christ and the mission as doing for someone outside of oneself who has not known God by way of teaching him or her truths of faith. Pope Francis faithfully exercised all religious practices which any Christian performs. However, that was not his true religion. His religion was that which bound him to human beings as brothers and sisters manifested in his down-to-earth acts and words which brought hope to many. He brought an alienated community of human people to recognise in the eyes of each other their neighbour. That was the meaning of the Church he would provide, a new perspective, a new wisdom, and a new understanding of faith.

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“Do Not Forget to Pray for Me”

The Endearing Humility of Pope Francis

SANTOSH EKKA OFM

I was one of the few people who had the grace to attend many Eucharistic celebrations and public audiences of Pope Francis. Whenever there was a public address by the Pope in St Peter's square, people of different faiths, languages, castes, colours, and nationalities would gather to catch a glimpse of him, listen to his message, and receive the papal blessing. His public appearance was always welcomed with loud shouts of “Papa Francesco!” followed by pin-drop silence. Then he would begin the liturgical greetings.

His message was never high-sounding dogmatic theology, but rather simple reflections that were applicable to all. Ordinary people could easily understand them. Yet at times, his message was direct and firm. People loved to hear him—as many of us did, too. Whenever he spoke, there would be a hushed silence, and when the speech ended, thunderous applause. All the messages of Pope Francis were deeply touching, each carrying a clear message.

However, after attending a few audiences, what impressed me the most were his final words. Since the moment he stepped onto the balcony of St Peter's Basilica on March 13, 2013, Pope Francis has consistently ended his speeches, homilies, and personal interactions with a simple but profound request: “Do not forget to pray for me.”

St Monica once asked her son Augustine to remember her at the altar of the Lord, meaning to pray for her while he celebrated the Eucharist. This was a central part of her final request. I am not sure whether Pope



Francis was directly inspired by St Monica, but what stands out is that he asks everyone to pray for him. This phrase, always delivered with heartfelt sincerity, captures the essence of his papacy—humility, humanity, and a deep sense of spiritual solidarity.

A Personal Touch in a Global Role

For a man who leads over a billion Catholics worldwide, Pope Francis's request is disarmingly intimate. Rather than seeking praise, recognition, obedience, or even understanding, he asks for prayer—a deeply personal act that transcends borders, languages, faiths, genders, ideologies, and cultures. It reflects the virtue of humility and reminds us that, despite his position, he too is a person in need of grace, support, and divine guidance.

In an age of increasingly centralised power—both religious and political—this repeated appeal reveals a leader who views himself not as a ruler, but as a fellow traveler in the journey of faith. It echoes the very first moments of his papacy, when he bowed before the people in St. Peter's Square and asked them to pray for him before he gave his blessing—a reversal of expectations that set the tone for everything that followed.

The Theology Behind the Request

At its core, the Pope's request taps into a deeply Catholic understanding of prayer as a communal and intercessory act. Catholics believe in the power of praying for others—not merely as a symbolic gesture, but as an act that genuinely opens the door for grace and transformation.

When Pope Francis asks for prayers, he acknowledges his own vulnerability and humanity. As the head of the Catholic Church, he does not pretend to be spotless or superhuman. Rather, he accepts his weaknesses. It is an act of humility that reaffirms a core Christian truth: no one is spiritually self-sufficient. Even the Pope—the Bishop of Rome and successor of St. Peter—must rely on the spiritual support of others. This echoes the words of St. Paul, who often asked early Christian communities to pray for him. In 2 Corinthians 1:11, Paul asked the Corinthians to pray for him so they could give thanks to God on his behalf. In Colossians 4:3-4, he asked for prayers so that God would open a door for him to proclaim the gospel. In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, Paul asked for prayers that he and his team might preach freely and be delivered from opposition. By echoing this ancient appeal, Pope Francis places himself firmly within the tradition of servant leadership.

A Recurrent Theme of Pope Francis's Papacy

The humility behind this phrase is not a performance or a search for sympathy—it is consistent with the themes that have shaped his papacy. Since becoming Pope, Francis has focused on mercy, service, and solidarity with the poor, marginalised, and ostracised. He has urged Church leaders to “go to the peripheries” and “smell like the sheep.”

Whether visiting slums, washing the feet of prisoners, or speaking out against war and environmental degradation, Pope Francis consistently presents himself not as a figure above others, but beside them.

In asking for prayer, he does not seek comfort or admiration. He invites a shared sense of responsibility. His request is a call to unity—reminding us that the Church is strongest when all its members support one another, especially through prayer.

The Power of Simplicity

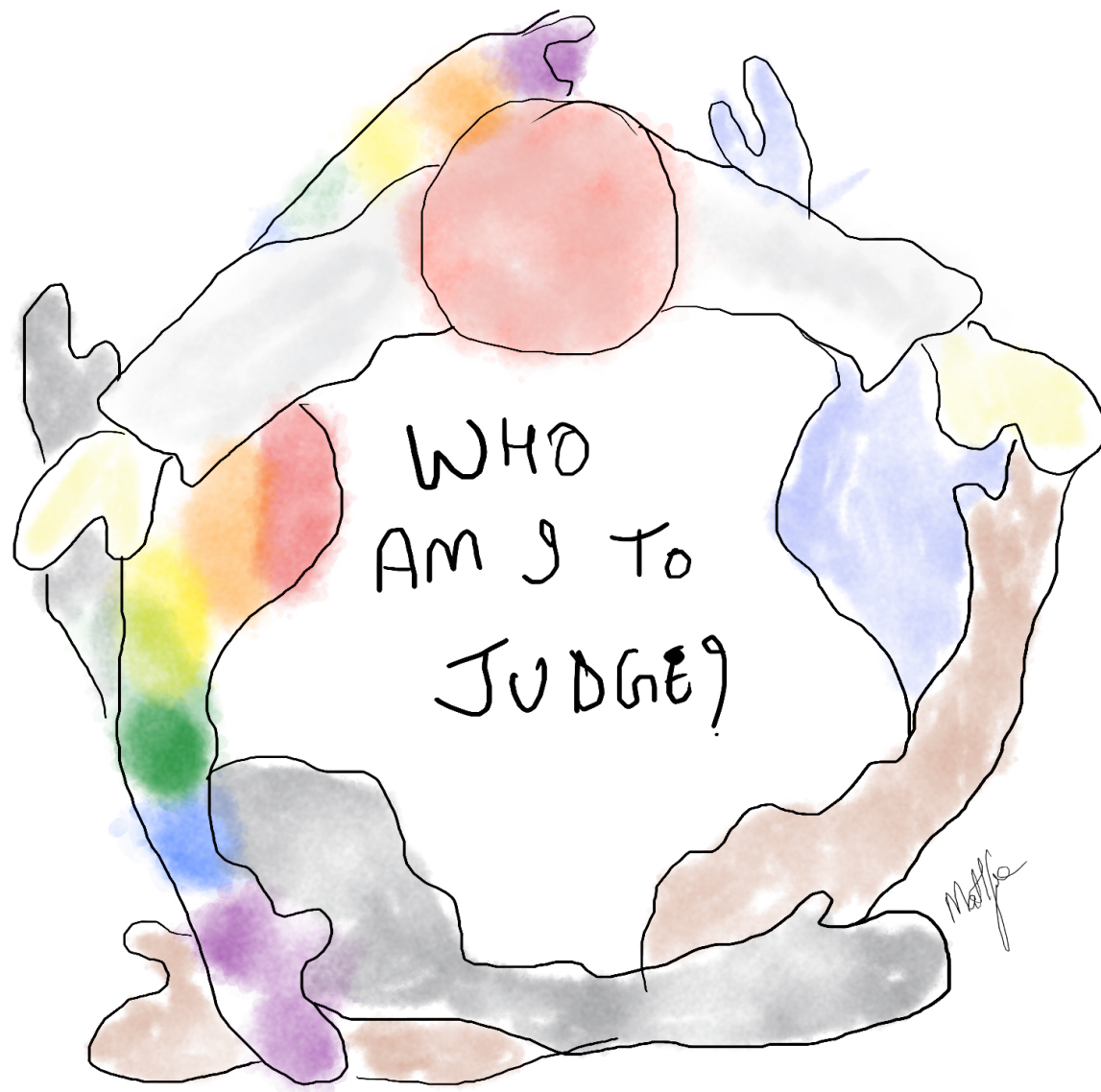
“Do not forget to pray for me” is a simple sentence, but it carries immense weight. It breaks down the barriers between the papacy and the pews, creating a personal connection with each listener—and, by extension, with the broader Church.

At a time when institutions often feel distant and unresponsive, Francis's words feel like a breath of sincerity. They remind us that even those in the highest spiritual offices need help, and that we are all bound together by a shared need for prayer, compassion, and grace.

Pope Francis's frequent request—“Do not forget to pray for me”—may seem small compared to his broader efforts to reform the Church or address global crises. But in many ways, it encapsulates the very heart of his papacy. It reveals a man deeply aware of his limitations, firmly rooted in faith, and passionately committed to walking with others, not above them.

Perhaps this is his way of living out the vision of a synodal Church. Whether one is Catholic or not, believer or skeptic, this humble refrain serves as a gentle reminder: no one is beyond the need for prayer, and no prayer is too small to matter.

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Pope Francis and the Language of Mercy

NAVEEN GEORGE OFM

My time in Rome (2013-2021) as a student at the Pontifical University Antonianum was marked by countless pilgrimages to St. Peter's Square. Despite the long lines, security checks, and logistical hurdles, I eagerly seized every opportunity to attend papal audiences, canonisations, and liturgies during Easter, Christmas, and other solemn occasions. These moments were not merely routine; they became lifelines of spiritual renewal. Standing among pilgrims from every corner of the world, I felt a profound connection to the universal Church—a connection embodied most vividly in Pope Francis. His presence radiated hope, even during Italy's darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when he celebrated Mass in an empty square, his words streaming into our isolated homes like a balm for weary souls. Through joy and despair, he stood as a shepherd who refused to let his flock walk alone.

The Synod on the Family—A Light in Complexity: In 2015, Pope Francis's address at the Synod on the Family crystallised why he resonates so deeply with my Christian journey. The synod, he emphasised, was not a tribunal to "solve" every challenge facing families, nor a battleground for ideological disputes. Instead, it was an invitation to view struggles—broken relationships, societal pressures, moral confusion—through the lens of the Gospel and the Church's living tradition. Here, three aspects of his leadership illuminated my faith:

Seeing with God's Eyes: Francis urged the Church to confront realities without fear or evasion. Rather than burying our heads in the sand or wielding doctrine like a weapon, he called for a gaze of compassion. Families, he acknowledged, are often "wounded," navigating crises of identity, economic instability, and loneliness. His vision was not to condemn but to "kindle the flame of faith" by meeting people where they are. This mirrored Christ's own ministry: a light that illuminates darkness without scorching the fragile.

Mercy Over Stones: The Pope's critique of "closed hearts" hiding behind the "chair of Moses" struck a chord. He challenged a mindset of superiority that reduces faith to rigid legalism, instead urging pastors to walk with people, not above them. His language shifted from archaic rigidity to the warmth of mercy—a reminder that the Gospel is not a museum artifact but a living fountain. By refusing to "demonise" or relativise, he embodied the delicate balance of truth and tenderness, upholding doctrine while letting its spirit breathe.

The Church as Field Hospital: Francis's papacy has been a clarion call to prioritise healing over condemnation. He reoriented the Church's mission toward proclaiming God's mercy, echoing Jesus's mandate to "bind up the brokenhearted" (Isaiah 61:1). This was no innovation but a return to the heart of the Gospel. His focus on "suffering people" rather than abstract ideas made faith tangible. During the pandemic, this pastoral urgency became visceral: his solitary prayers in the rain-soaked square reminded us that even in emptiness, God's presence endures.

A Humility That Transforms: When Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio stepped onto the loggia in 2013 as Pope Francis, his first act was to bow and ask the crowds, "Pray for me." This humility—rooted in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi—has defined his pontificate. He leads not as a prince but as a servant, recognizing that true authority flows from surrender to God's grace.

Years after leaving Rome, I carry his legacy with me: a Church that meets the world not with anathemas but with open arms, that speaks the language of love in a dialect all can understand. In Pope Francis, I see a shepherd who reminds us that the road to heaven is paved not with perfect answers, but with imperfect hearts seeking the Father's mercy. And for that, I will always pray for him—as he so often asked us to do.

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A Field Hospital and a Smelling Shepherd

Pope Francis modelled a path rooted in honesty, compassion, and deep concern for human dignity.

WILLIAM GALI

I am one of the many who will deeply miss Pope Francis, yet I remain hopeful that his legacy—especially his Shepherd-style leadership—will live on. By leadership, I mean everyone entrusted with responsibility in the Church: from the Pope to clergy, religious, community and family leaders, and heads of Christian institutions, including lay associations.

Pope John Paul II dreamed of a pope from the “New World”—a hope fulfilled on March 13, 2013, with the election of Pope Francis, the first Jesuit, first pope from the Americas, and the first non-European in over 1,200 years. All this was significant as his papacy marked a turning point for those longing for a Global Church that is open, inclusive, and compassionate. Pope Francis lived out the vision of Jesus, who asked Peter, a fisherman, to take on this role. He did nothing exceptional but did what Jesus asked us to do: wash one another’s feet. Pope Francis, who took the name of the poor man of Assisi, did this as if it were his only nature, despite being the head of the largest institutions in the world. He leaves this legacy to the incoming Pope and all church leaders. My heartfelt prayer is that all Church leaders carry forward the legacy of the People’s Pope.



“The Church is for everyone”—Pope Francis powerfully expressed this vision of an inclusive Church in a landmark interview by the Jesuit (September 19, 2013). He likened the Church to a field hospital after battle, saying it must first heal wounds and warm hearts, not focus on rules or minor concerns. This striking metaphor captured global attention, reflecting his deep commitment to mercy, compassion, and caring for those suffering before anything else. Pope Francis consistently emphasised that blessings are meant for all individuals, reflecting his inclusive pastoral approach. In a January 2024 interview with *La Stampa*, he stated, “The Gospel is to sanctify everyone,” highlighting that the Church should not create lists determining who is welcome and who is not.

A few things that testify to this commitment are:

- Francis emphasises mercy over judgment, compassion and pastoral accompaniment over rigid rule enforcement.
- Advocacy for encounter over ideology, urging against reducing faith to doctrine alone.
- Allowing blessings for all people, emphasising pastoral care over doctrinal judgment through *Fiducia Supplicans* (2023).
- Launching of the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024), allowing laypeople (including women) voting rights.
- Washing the feet of women prisoners, encountering the LGBTQI+ community, and advocating for humane migration policies.
- Appointing cardinals and bishops from underrepresented regions, signalling a shift from Eurocentric leadership.
- Launching the annual World Day of the Poor, supporting local initiatives for the poor and excluded. And so on and on.

If this is the kind of Church Pope Francis envisioned—a field hospital for the wounded—then its shepherds must reflect that same spirit of closeness and compassion. From the start of his papacy, Pope Francis called for “shepherds with the smell of the sheep,” urging Church leaders to live among their people, truly knowing their struggles

and joys. This memorable phrase, first shared during the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday in 2013, echoed the biblical image of God providing shepherds after His own heart—those who protect the suffering and comfort the innocent. Pope Francis lived this out not through grand gestures, but through everyday humility, presence, and service, becoming a shepherd who walked with his flock. This was reflected through:

- Francis emphasised the importance of priests and bishops being close to their communities, living in simple apartments, and walking with them through everyday joys and struggles.
- Authentic Humility and Service through the church leaders living in the lives of those they serve, especially the poor, marginalised, and suffering.
- Incarnational ministry reflects Jesus as the Good Shepherd who knows, loves, and lays down his life for his sheep and reflects the pastoral, humble, and grounded in lived realities of Church leadership.
- Blessings for Everyone: The Church does not bless same-sex unions, but can bless individuals seeking God’s grace. The Vatican’s 2023 declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, supports this view, permitting priests to offer blessings to individuals in same-sex relationships, provided they are not confused with marriage rites.

Leadership often intersects with politics, and Pope Francis modelled a path marked not by activism, but by diplomacy rooted in honesty, compassion, and deep concern for human dignity. He spoke boldly about injustice without judgment or accusation, earning respect even from secular authorities and the powerful because his words came from lived experience and personal suffering, not ideology. Francis used his jurisdiction not to manipulate but to open spaces for dialogue and healing. His approach was grounded in kindness and respect for the marginalised and those in power. His “politics” was one of listening, negotiating, and washing feet—showing that true Christian diplomacy is born from love, not revenge or self-interest.

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STOP PRODUCING, CONSUMING, AND DISTRIBUTING UNSUSTAINABLY

Pope Francis bequeaths a rich legacy that melts a church frozen in time, pushes boundaries towards its prophetic mission for the excluded, staying stubbornly focused on the vulnerable.

DR MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

We were driving back from Goa when we heard the news about the passing of our beloved Pope Francis in Rome. It's only the month of April and yet with Climate Change, the May Flower of the Gulmohur were blazing scarlet in the Ghats, in between the fresh green teak and sal leaves in the jungles. Now everytime I see the Gulmohur I will remember Pope Francis, who wrote his *Laudato si* which I remember making my Science and Environment Media Studies, students read and understand. In honor of his extraordinary life and legacy, we are humbled to share from his most profound work.

Laudato si', his papal encyclical on environment and related issues, foregrounds the moral roots of environmental degradation, climate change, and its punishing consequences. He pins this on an impoverished spirit driven by crass materialism that decimates nature to produce, consume, and distribute unsustainably, and to climate injustice wherein powerful nations contribute disproportionately to global warming, while poorer nations carry the greater burden of environmental and climate crises.

I quote, "*Laudato Si'*, mi' Signore" – "Praise be to you, my Lord". In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through

our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs"

He goes on to write – "This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

He clearly states that our planet is facing such a grave crisis because of unchecked human activity and over exploitation of the Earth's free treasures. He quotes the hymn of St Francis of Assisi where brother sun and sister moon give sustenance and life to all living creatures on earth.

"When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day and through whom you give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong".

To the bishops of Brazil he has pointed out that nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into a relationship with him. Discovering this presence leads us to cultivate the "ecological virtues". This is not to forget that there is an infinite distance between God and the things of this world, which do not possess his fullness. "

The son of Italian immigrants, Pope Francis at 88, was burdened by the weight of age, the frailty of body, and the gravity of illness. But his spirit was astonishingly afire with the living force and breath of the Liberative Gospel of Christ — A Gospel for All, for the poor and marginalised. Pope Francis bequeaths a rich historical legacy that melts a church frozen in time, pushes boundaries towards its prophetic mission for the excluded, staying stubbornly focused on the vulnerable.

He understood something many religious leaders forget: that God doesn't reside only in temples or churches or mosques. That holiness isn't a place — it's a way of living, a way of seeing others, a way of choosing kindness, over and over, even when it hurts. With deep reverence, we join the world in mourning the passing of Pope Francis, a spiritual shepherd whose humility, compassion, and tireless advocacy for peace and justice inspired millions.

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The Inconvenient Example of a Pope

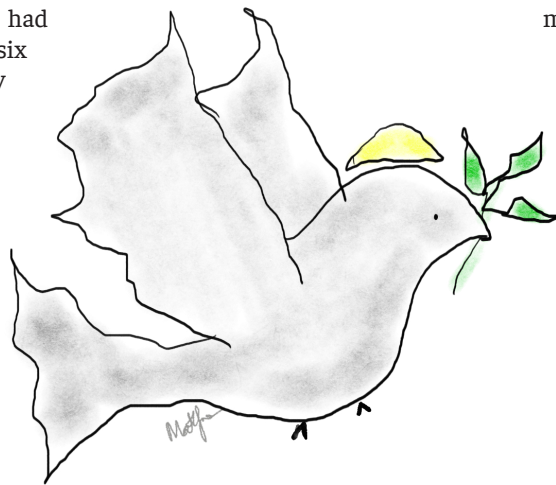
Roshan Sylvester

Pope Francis for me was a friend I never met or had the chance to talk to. I felt like he had a place in his heart for me. To me he is that person who I could love and respect, but also openly have a grouse with (if it came to that) and still remain friends.

On the day of his election standing on the 'balcony' he seemed as exhausted as any of us who were awaiting the news of who the new Pope would be. Just when I felt there was an air of humanness about him, he went on to say the strangest thing I have heard any leader within the church say, "Pray for me." That is when we became friends.

In being humane he exposed his vulnerability to sin, I feel this is what drew hordes of vulnerable communities of people to his embrace – a sense mutual empathy. Pope Francis in a way knew who he really needed prayers from – the poor in spirit. Rightfully so, his papacy can be defined by the people he engaged with from the start of his Papacy till the end.

In 2013 he found himself in Youth Detention Centre in Rome. He washed the feet of 12 inmates, some of them women. I still remember the (mostly pleasant) shock on the faces of the faithful in my church when the parish priest had to wash the feet of six women too. Leading by example Pope Francis started from the simplest things within the radar of the legacy Jesus left behind. After all, Jesus asked us to love God and love the neighbour as ourselves – how simpler could that get (if we tried without inhibitions). The last days



of his Papacy found the only Catholic Church in Gaza, Holy Family Church's parish priest receive regular calls from an ailing Pope on a wheelchair.

Pope Francis was that person who could be introduced to anyone, knowing he would not make anybody feel judged. He was respectful of those who had public disputes with him, even some of his own cardinals. As a people's Pope he did all he could while being mindful of his limitations as an administrator, head of State and a religious leader.

Through his shortcomings he effortlessly showed us all how simple it is to be a human being – do your part and pray, consistently; even better, ask people to pray for you too. Which is why I feel part of whatever he has tried to do and done. He was aware that he would not see an end to war, suffering, human trafficking, prejudice, homophobia, hunger, gender inequality, ecological exploitation, injustice, persecution, and so many other things – but initiated and continued efforts to tackle these problems. He bore his docility on his meek shoulders to his grave.

He activated much needed conversations in revisiting the role of the church in being an efficient 'field hospital' (as he would put it). Through his Papacy, I found myself getting treated in this field hospital but also working there. His example has shown us all that doing the tiny things matter. Call a friend who is in constant distress, be firm but kind,

be conscious of not wasting nature's resources, share what you have with the needy, take a moment to realise that you are loved by God, be joyful and if everything else fails – pray; ask for prayers, intercede with every living or dead person to pray. While we do these tiny things, may we not forget to listen to each other. After all a good friend listens and only then acts. Pope Francis is now weaved in with all other people who tried to leave the world better than they found it into the memory of the world. May we also contribute to leaving our world better than we found it.

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Argentina and St Francis Gave Birth to Pope Francis

GEORGINA MARIE CARNEIRO

Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio—none other than our very own Pope Francis was a Jesuit with a Franciscan approach. St Francis of Assisi was his inspiration. When I heard, way back that our Spiritual Head was from Argentina, my first thought went to Football. Now, whenever I hear of Argentina, I think of His Holiness Pope Francis.

He has left a mark in the history of our Catholic Church that will be difficult to categorise. He based his ministry on the values and ideals of St Francis of Assisi. Ideals like, simple living, love of the environment, promoting peace, etc. His encyclical *Laudato si'* subtitled "on care for our common home", Pope criticises consumerism and irresponsible economical development, laments environmental degradation, and global warming; and calls all people of the world to take swift and collective action. His encyclical *Fratelli tutti* drew inspiration from St Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of Creatures* and the Saint's emphasis on "Fraternity and Social Friendship" is in fact signed at his tomb in Assisi.

Some of His Holiness' views often pushed the church's orthodox boundaries, and this quite definitely set him apart. Pope Francis's papacy was an open book and he has left his successor a challenging task. I draw strength from the fact that the Holy Spirit will fortify and guide the Conclave of Cardinals to choose wisely.

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IN STAMPS

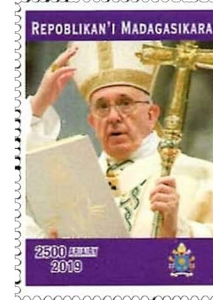
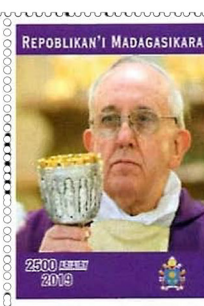
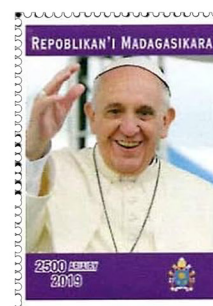
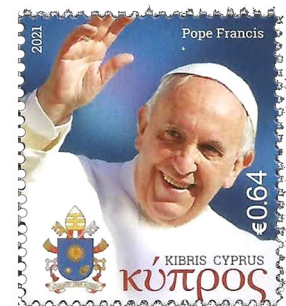
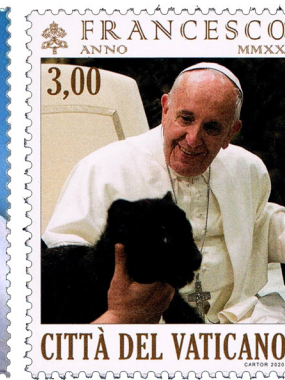
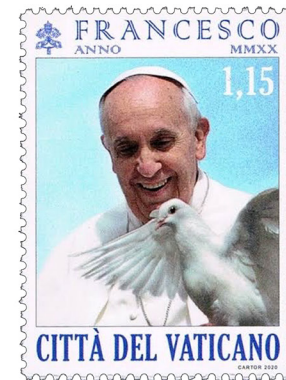
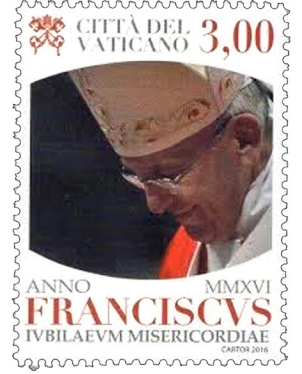
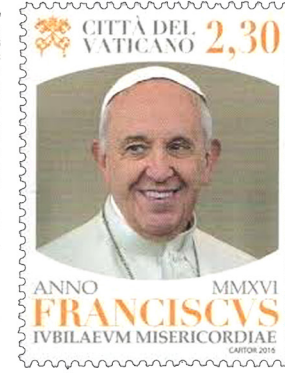
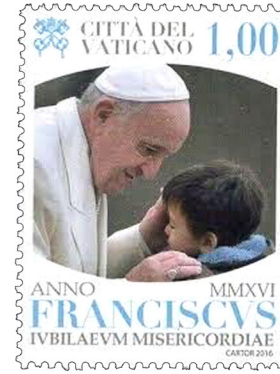
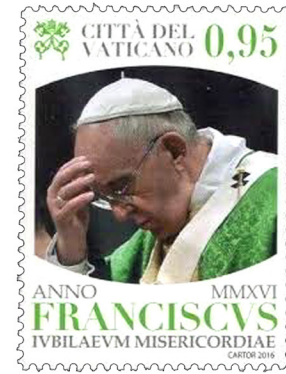
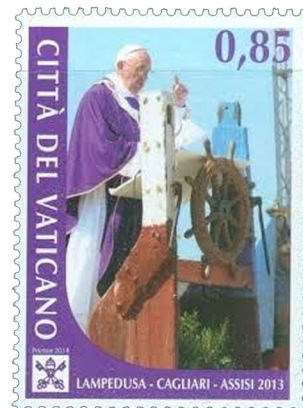
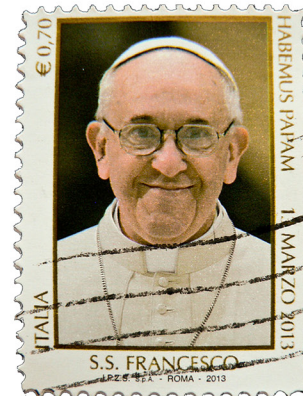
Pope Francis: Peoples' Pope

Stamps from TOM JOHN
Text by Sidney J MASCARENHAS OFM

The Church has had a history of 2,025 years. Pope Francis was its last pope. After a brief illness, Pope Francis died on Easter Monday, 21 April, 2025, at the age of 88 at his residence in the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta. At 9:45 AM, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, announced the death of Pope Francis from the Casa Santa Marta with these words:

Dearest brothers and sisters, with deep sorrow I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis. At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the house of the Father. His entire life was dedicated to the service of the Lord and of His Church. He taught us to live the values of the Gospel with fidelity, courage, and universal love, especially in favour of the poorest and most marginalized. With immense gratitude for his example as a true disciple of the Lord Jesus, we commend the soul of Pope Francis to the infinite merciful love of the One and Triune God.

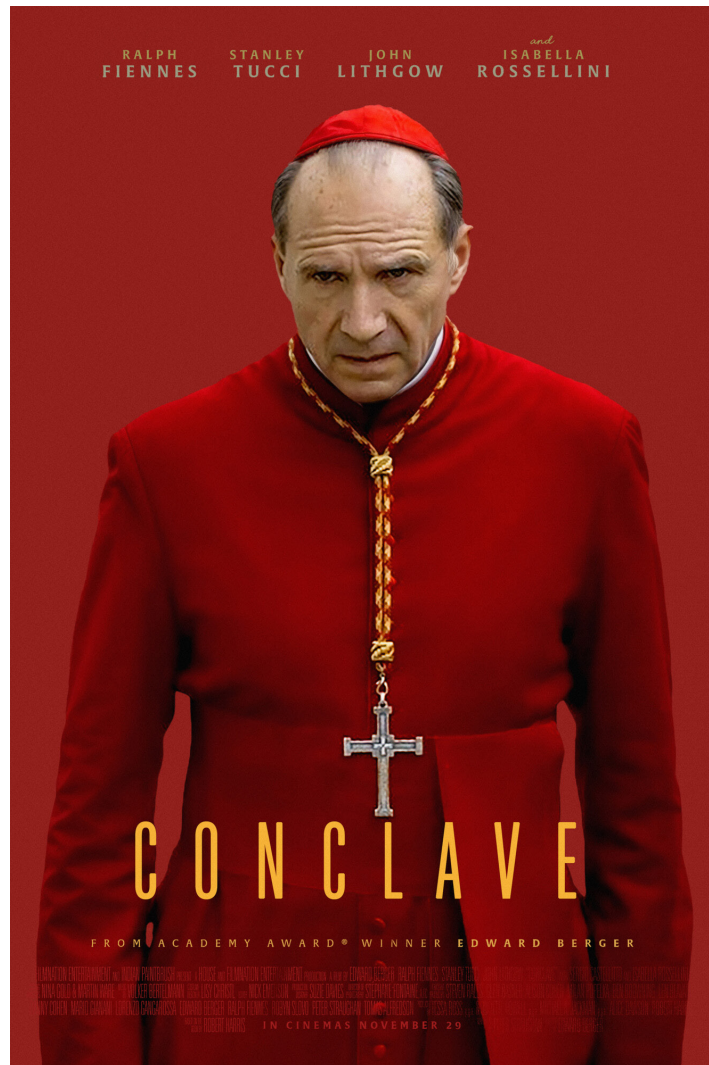
Pope Francis has been laid to rest in Rome's St Mary Major Basilica on Saturday, 26 April 2025. Foreign delegations from 164 countries attended the funeral. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the Vatican to mourn the late pontiff, who was loved by many around the world for railing against war, capitalism and climate change and for his work with the poor and dispossessed.



Conclave: The Sacred Theatre of Shadows

The final act of the film is where Berger makes his boldest choices. Without spoiling the core twist, it is sufficient to say that *Conclave* refuses the easy resolution of closure.

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV



Edward Berger's *Conclave* (2024) is not simply a film about a papal election. It is an intricately layered psychological chamber piece, a cloistered political thriller, and a deeply human meditation on faith, power, and memory. What distinguishes *Conclave* from its potential genre clichés is its solemn pace and precise visual language, merging narrative economy with operatic emotional undertones. This is cinema of containment: physically restricted to the walls of the Vatican yet spiritually vast, vibrating with the suppressed anxieties of its characters and the burden of their celestial responsibilities. In adapting Robert Harris's novel, screenwriter Peter Straughan pares down exposition, trusting the tension of performance and mise-en-scène to articulate the emotional gravity of the story. What emerges is a film that both honors the reverence of its setting and dissects the fragile architecture of human morality beneath the ornate robes of religious ritual.

The narrative of *Conclave* is deceptively simple: following the sudden death of the Pope, 118 cardinals are summoned to Vatican City to elect his successor. At the center of this process stands Cardinal Lawrence (Ralph Fiennes), the Camerlengo—a steward of the Church during the sede vacante, or papal vacancy. As the conclave proceeds under centuries-old protocols, a revelation about the Pope's final decision begins to unfold, threatening to rupture the delicate political equilibrium within the College of Cardinals.

The genius of Berger's direction lies in how he frames these performances within a rigorously symmetrical visual style.

Yet rather than veering into overt melodrama, Berger's film simmers with quiet, disquieting restraint. It is a film about secrets—not just institutional, but personal and theological—and the unbearable weight of their concealment.

Fiennes delivers what may be one of the most internalised performances of his career. As Cardinal Lawrence, he is gaunt, cerebral, and ever-watchful. His voice, often a mere whisper, is modulated with the solemnity of liturgical chant. There are no dramatic outbursts, only the slow accumulation of moral burden etched into every twitch of his brow. Lawrence is a man forged by the Church but now haunted by its contradictions. He moves through the frescoed corridors like a ghost, as if already burdened by the penance he knows he must eventually pay. In a lesser actor's hands, Lawrence could have become a cipher—a vessel for ecclesiastical exposition. But Fiennes imbues him with a tragic dignity, a Job-like figure confronting the unbearable silence of God amidst the politics of men.

The genius of Berger's direction lies in how he frames these performances within a rigorously symmetrical visual style. Working with cinematographer Stéphane Fontaine, Berger evokes the painterly solemnity of Renaissance tableaux. Every shot is composed with near liturgical precision: cardinals arranged in radial patterns, long dolly shots down marbled hallways, high-angle views that render the Sistine Chapel as both prison and altar. The camera rarely moves fast; instead, it glides with a reverent steadiness, as if afraid to disturb the sacred air. The visual austerity is not merely aesthetic—it reflects the moral paralysis of the Church itself, a body incapable of swift motion, burdened by centuries of self-imposed ritual.

Yet this is not a static film. Beneath the calm veneer, Berger choreographs a psychological dance—a cloaked battle of ideologies, egos, and hidden pasts. The

casting is impeccable: Stanley Tucci as the charming yet calculating Cardinal Bellini, John Lithgow as the aging, conservative Tremblay, and Sergio Castellitto as the steely Roman traditionalist Cardinal Petrucci. Isabella Rossellini, in a hauntingly silent role as Sister Agnes, adds a spectral counterpoint to the masculine world of the conclave. Her few scenes punctuate the film like incense—ethereal, fleeting, but essential to the atmosphere.

Volker Bertelmann's score is sparse and ecclesial, constructed around choral motifs and organ flourishes that echo through the film like liturgical responses. But more often, Berger leans into silence, allowing the creaks of antique wooden doors, the shuffle of cassocks, and the Latin invocations to carry the sonic weight. The absence of music in key scenes forces the viewer into contemplative stillness. It is, in effect, a sonic meditation that mirrors the film's thematic concerns: faith thrives not in noise, but in silence.

One of the film's most impressive accomplishments is its resistance to cynicism. In an age where political thrillers often delight in exposing institutional rot, *Conclave* dares to acknowledge complexity. Yes, there is maneuvering, backroom deals, whispered confidences. But these are not presented as corruption per se. Rather, they are shown as human responses to impossible dilemmas. Berger does not indict the Church as much as he lays bare its frailty. The cardinals are not villains; they are men imprisoned by legacy, by guilt, by the fear that they may be unable to lead a modern world.

And yet, at its heart, *Conclave* is also about memory—and the violent struggle between personal history and institutional continuity. As Cardinal Lawrence confronts the revelation left behind by the Pope, the film's narrative structure bends inward. We are offered glimpses of Lawrence's past, rendered not through flashback but through affective montage: a shift in lighting, the tilt of a chalice, the echo of a distant voice. These memory shards speak to a deeper psychological truth—how the past lives within the body, how it finds its way to the surface despite the strictures of control.

The final act of the film is where Berger makes his boldest choices. Without spoiling the core twist, it is sufficient to say that *Conclave* refuses the easy resolution of closure. The smoke may turn white, but the soul remains grey. In a breathtaking final sequence—silent, slow, sacred—Berger offers a vision of the Church not as triumphant, but trembling. It is here that the film's true genius is revealed: it transforms what could have been a political thriller into a theological meditation. It becomes a passion play without resurrection, a sacred drama that ends not in revelation, but in moral ambiguity.

Cinephiles will no doubt find rich intertextual resonances. *Conclave* evokes the cloistered paranoia of Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men*, the ascetic minimalism of Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, and the dark institutionalism of Costa-Gavras's *Amen*. Yet it also carries a distinctly modern energy, grounded in the post-clerical anxieties of the 21st century. Berger's Vatican is not merely a setting—it is a symbol of humanity's broader struggle with tradition, truth, and transcendence.

What makes *Conclave* so fascinating is its refusal to comfort. Unlike *The Two Popes* (2019), which found reconciliation through dialogue, or *The Godfather Part III* (1990), which used the Vatican as an allegory for moral compromise, *Conclave* does not resolve the contradictions it presents. It simply lays them bare, like relics on an altar. The viewer, like the faithful, is left to discern their meaning. And in this, the film becomes an act of devotion—not to any doctrine, but to the complexity of human conscience.

Indeed, the power of Berger's vision lies in his attention to cinematic ritual. Every gesture in the film is imbued with meaning: the casting of ballots, the burning of paper, the donning of vestments. These are not merely plot mechanics; they are sacraments, visual prayers that rhythmically structure the narrative. In this way, *Conclave* becomes a liturgy in itself—each scene a homily, each cut a responsorial psalm. It is rare to find a film so comfortable in its own solemnity, so unafraid to take its time. But time, like faith, is what *Conclave* demands.

The final image—a figure alone in the papal chambers, silhouetted against Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*—lingers long after the credits. It is an image that encapsulates the film's paradox: that divine authority must always wrestle with human fallibility. In this tension lies the true subject of *Conclave*: not just who will lead the Church, but what it means to lead at all.

For those attuned to cinema as an art form, *Conclave* offers a rich field of study. Its editing rhythms mirror Gregorian chant; its color palette (all golds, crimsons, and funeral blacks) evokes both Rembrandt and Caravaggio. Its narrative progression unfolds like a symphony in four movements: the introduction of themes (arrival), their development (deliberation), the rupture (revelation), and the coda (election). Berger's achievement lies in orchestrating this complexity without sacrificing emotional resonance.

Conclave is not a film that seeks to please everyone. It is austere, patient, and unapologetically intellectual. But for the viewer willing to enter its world—not just watch it, but contemplate it—it offers something increasingly rare in modern cinema: a profound, unsettling encounter with the sacred and the political, the personal and the universal. Like the best spiritual experiences, it leaves you with more questions than answers. And that, perhaps, is its greatest success. For in a world eager for clarity, *Conclave* insists on the holiness of doubt.

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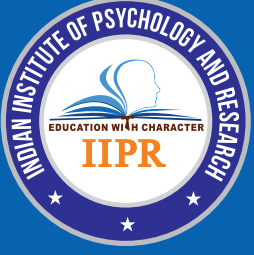
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