

# The Irish Catholic

## WORLD PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE 'POPE OF SURPRISES'

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## Easter brings hope to the Irish Church

### Hundreds of adults come home to the Faith

Renata Milán Morales

More than 100 catechumens were welcomed into the Catholic Church across Ireland during the Easter ceremonies and most were young adults from diverse backgrounds.

Seventeen adults were received into the Catholic Church at Galway Cathedral during the Easter Vigil; in Dublin, over 70 adults went to their local parishes to be Baptised, Confirmed and receive their First Communion. In Cork at least 3 young adults were baptised and 11 were confirmed.

Addressing seventeen new members of the Catholic Church in Galway Cathedral, Bishop Michael Duignan said: "God has touched your hearts. You are now his - our brothers and sisters in the faith". The Bishop described the moment when the catechumens received their First Communion as "the first of a lifetime of sitting and feasting and being spiritually nourished".

In his homily, Bishop Alan McGuckian of Down and Connor, where 15 individuals received their baptism and 15 were confirmed, said "Soon the catechumens will be baptised. This is not just a symbolic ritual or an initiation into a community - it is a profound spiritual reality in which God offers a new birth."

What you are about to experience tonight is nothing less than a divine exchange. You are baptised and confirmed as a whole new creation... We become part of God's provision for a world in need - bearers of resurrection hope in everyday places".

### In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit



Adults across Ireland receive the sacraments of initiation during the Easter Vigil on Saturday April 19.

#### THE POPE LOVED A GOOD ARGUMENT

Martina Purdy

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#### POPE FRANCIS, GAUDÍ AND MICK JAGGER

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The mission of *The Irish Catholic* to share the Gospel truth has never been more critical.



## The Irish Catholic

One of the last few independent Catholic voices in the Irish media landscape, the weekly print and digital formats provide news and in-depth analyses of hot button issues from reputed contributors.

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# Ireland mourns the death of Pope Francis



Two of the faithful pay their respects in St Mary's Pro Cathedral in Dublin at the book of condolence for Pope Francis. Photo: John McElroy

## Chai Brady

Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin has led tributes to Pope Francis who died on Monday morning, describing him as “a faithful shepherd” whose papacy was “a profound gift to the Church and world”, extending condolences on behalf of Ireland’s bishops and faithful.

Archbishop Martin spoke of his personal humility and his unwavering commitment to the poor and marginalised, he said: “Pope Francis’ papacy has been a profound gift to the Church and the world. He embodied a Church that listens, accompanies, and embraces all. His vision was not one of rigid structures or distant authority, but of a Church committed to encounter and deep solidarity with humanity.”

Pope Francis died aged 88 at his residence in Casa Santa Marta in Vatican City. Cardinal Kevin Farrell, originally from Drimnagh in Dublin, has now assumed the role of Camerlengo, overseeing the Papal *interregnum* – the period of *sede vacante* between the death of a Pope and the election of his successor.

Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ of Down and Connor described the Pope as a man of “humility and humanity” whose ministry was rooted in “a Gospel-inspired vision of a Church where, guided by the Holy Spirit, we journey together in faith”.

Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross asked his diocese to unite in prayer for Pope Francis and gave thanks “for his selfless service and dedication to the end of his earthly life”. He continued: “We remember Pope Francis as one who challenged us to reach out to those on the margins and to bring God’s mercy to all those we encounter”.

Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert and Galway described the late Pope as “an ever faithful servant in the vineyard of the Lord”. He praised the Pope’s love for the poor, his compassion for migrants, and his commitment to building a Church focused on the people of God.

The Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, Bishop Paul Connell said: “Pope Francis has made an immense contribution to the life of the Church and the wider world. He was keenly aware of the challenges faced by humanity and he constantly focused on these challenges during his pontificate, not least in the area of climate change.”

Bishop Connell also praised the Pope’s focus on care, respect, and compassion for the poor and marginalised.

Tributes also came from other Christian denominations and other faiths, including the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, who said that the late Pope “spoke with compassion to them [Catholics], but not only to them, to the whole world. There are so few people who can do that these days, who can speak beyond their own boundaries. So we all feel a bit diminished, I think, by his passing”.

The Methodist Church in Ireland, led by Rev Dr John Alderdice and Mrs Elaine Barnett, praised the Pope’s ecumenical spirit and advocacy for social justice. “We commend his advocacy for the poor, his desire to prioritise care for the most vulnerable, and his call for all people to embrace their role as stewards of creation,” they said.

Chief Rabbi of Ireland Yoni Wieder said Pope Francis was “a man of principle, with a deep care for all people” who “was committed to making faith and spirituality relevant in the modern world”.

Shaykh Dr Umar Al-Qadri, Chairperson of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council said: “Pope Francis was a beacon of peace, compassion, and unity... His leadership in promoting understanding and cooperation among religions has left an enduring legacy that will continue to inspire generations.”

**i** A book of condolences for people to record their sympathy following the death of Pope Francis is available at [catholicbishops.ie](http://catholicbishops.ie), and on the Irish bishops’ social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, X [formerly Twitter], and on BlueSky

# Catholic education and papal surprises...



Fr Eamonn Conway

Three years ago this week, on the April 20, 2022, a group of 38 teachers, lecturers and students from various schools and colleges in Ireland left the Villa Palazzola in the Roman hills in the early hours of the morning to beat the rush-hour traffic. We had been invited to a private audience with Pope Francis but no idea how “private” it would be or how long it might last. Up to the last moment we feared it might be cancelled as the situation in Ukraine continued to worsen. At best we hoped to get to meet and greet the Pope before he moved on to other groups. Instead, we were ushered into a room at the back of the Hall of Paul VI, where, upon arrival, Pope Francis surprised even his own staff by beginning the visit with a handshake for each of us. There was something very humble about this, given that he was clearly in discomfort walking and that Covid-19 was still a concern. People commented afterwards that from that moment they felt they were in the presence of someone special.

Our visit was part of the GRACE (Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education) project. I had prepared a few words of introduction in Spanish but given that an interpreter was present, and that I didn’t in any case feel



Fr Eamonn Conway addressing the late Pope Francis

all that confident, I spoke in English, only to be quickly interrupted by the Pope who said, “Slow down, Father, we have time!” As it turned out, we had his undivided attention for three quarters of an hour.

Departing from his prepared text, Pope Francis responded to what I presented from the GRACE project: “I liked that vision of education – I’ll say it with my own words – in tension between risk and security. What you do is a beautiful thing. We must break with the idea that educating means filling one’s head with ideas. That’s the way we educate automatons, cerebral minds, not people.” He quoted from an Argentine poet, “Everything the tree has produced comes from beneath the ground.” Good education, Pope Francis said, receives from tradition, but which is always dynamic rather than static. People need roots but cannot remain stuck in them: we take from the past in order to move forward.

After engaging in conversation with us as a group for some time, Pope Francis ended by giving us his blessing and, once again, making his way around the room to greet everyone individually, this time lingering a little

longer. He said to us that education had always been his passion, and we sensed this by the quality of his presence. “The true educator,” he told us, “accompanies, takes one by the hand, listens, dialogues.” That was exactly how he interacted with us.

Ours was one of the last audiences during which Pope Francis wasn’t using a wheelchair. As soon as news spread of his death the WhatsApp group of those who had travelled together to Rome, dormant for the past three years, sprang to life again with memories of what was recalled as an “extraordinary privilege”.

The reality, of course, is that because of how generous and self-giving Pope Francis was with his time and presence, people from all parts of the world were extended the same privilege. The greatest tribute we can pay to him is to try to practise in our own lives and service the generosity, courage, determination and other-centredness that characterised his pontificate.

**i** Prof. Eamonn Conway is a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam and Professor of Integral Human Development at the University of Notre Dame Australia

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# Irish priest returns St Thérèse's rare book to France

Renata Steffens

Celebrating the centenary of the canonisation of St Thérèse of Lisieux, a rare first-edition of her biography will be returned home through the hands of an Irish priest. Fr Declan Hurley, Adm. St Mary's Presbytery, Navan and Chairperson of the National Synodal Team, bought the book in an auction in 2022 and will return it to the Carmelite Convent during a pilgrimage on May 25-30.

The book titled *Soeur Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jesus* was published in 1898, only a year after Thérèse's death and is the compilation of all the notebooks St Thérèse wrote telling her life story.

Isadore Guérin, St Thérèse's uncle, commissioned the original 2,000 copies. Those books "were sent around to all of the common convents and monasteries and given to friends and visitors," the priest said. "I always had this dream that maybe I was to find one of these 2,000 copies."

The asking price at the auction was of only €60, so the priest thought it was not an original first edition. However, once the book arrived, "I just noticed among the blank pages a Latin phrase meaning 'from the library of I. Guérin', that's her uncle".



Fr Declan Hurley holding the rare book.

With that information, Fr Hurley "emailed the archives of the Carmelite Convent in Lisieux." After some tests and analysis, the book was confirmed to be an original first edition.

"I firmly believe that in some way Thérèse wanted me to have this, because I would be aware of its significance. The Sisters in the convent were very kind and said that maybe I should keep this for my lifetime. Or maybe in my will, I could

bequeath it to the convent.

"But I said, 'look, you never know what can happen when things can go wrong,'" so the priest decided "it would be nice to mark the canonisation [anniversary] by returning [the book] to the convent." Fr Hurley's niece, who is ten, will be the one handing the book to the Sisters, so the book's "memory will live on in the family."

[Read the full interview in next week's edition.](#)

# Young men are longing for 'something truer' – Men's ministry priest

Renata Milán Morales

A recent survey from Britain found that young men more than young women are turning up at church. In the demographic of 18-24-year-olds, 12% of young women are attending regularly in contrast to the 21% of men in this age group.

Observing this reality taking place in Galway, Fr Conor McDonough OP shared on his X account, "Every Mass has a handful [of young men] who look like standard issue North Face lads, but they're very serious and very devout."

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Barry White, based in Mullingar said, "Many young men are realising the emptiness of this [secular] model and are longing for something more, something 'truer'."

Echoing the priests' words, Harry (32)

sistently let down by what the world has to offer. Shallow, short-lived pleasures and lack of meaning greatly contrast with the Church's wealth of reason and truth and the sense of purpose it provides... I think young people are reaching that point. Constant disappointment leads to the pursuit of a greater good."

In recent years, a quiet but significant movement has been developing among young men in Ireland, explains Fr Barry White. "Across college campuses in Dublin, Cork, and Belfast and within youth movements, many are seeking something deeper."

Fr Barry White, who has previously work in men's ministry and masculinity in the Church explained that his "experience... has allowed me to see the growth of young men who are interested in and coming into



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# ‘We are ministering in a time of increasing pressure’ says bishop

Renata Steffens

“Our role as priests...is more important now than ever,” said Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll, in his homily at the Chrism Mass in St Mary’s Cathedral, Kilkenny on April 16. “The Ireland we serve today is different from the one many of us knew in years past. The Church no longer holds the central place in society that it once did,” he said.

Even though much has changed, “people still search for meaning. They still long for something deeper than what the world offers.” Knowing that, their task as priests “is to sow the seed, to be faithful, to keep showing up, even when the results are unseen.”

Bishop Coll said that “locally, we see the effects of isolation, as many in our parishes, particularly the elderly, feel forgotten. The traditional sense of community is weakening... Loneliness is becoming a silent

epidemic, with mental health struggles rising across all age groups.”

However, “we must resist the temptation to despair. We were never promised easy ground for the Gospel... We are living and ministering in a time of increasing pressure, and I know that many of you feel the weight of it.

“The demands on your time and energy seem endless. Parishes may be declining in the numbers who practice, but the workload does not shrink. We serve alongside fewer priests, an aging presbyterate, and ever-increasing responsibilities. The burden can feel heavy,” the bishop said. “We need to share that burden more and more with parishioners as we encourage and nurture a greater sense of co-responsibility in mission in our parishes and pastoral areas.”

“Ireland is changing. Ossory is changing,” the bishop concluded. “The Church is changing. But Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.”

## Rejection of the Faith in Ireland is opening door to demonic - exorcist

Chai Brady

A leading American exorcist due to speak at Knock Shrine in June has said that the collapse of Catholic faith in Ireland is leaving individuals and the country exposed to the demonic.

Msgr Stephen Rossetti, a priest of the Diocese of Syracuse, psychologist and exorcist, told *The Irish Catholic*: “More and more people are abandoning the faith, which is the shield against the demonic... The faith protects us.”

He continued: “Exorcists are reporting a sharp increase of those requesting a solemn exorcism. We have seen an ‘explosion’ of requests from people suffering

demonic affliction.

“So many people, especially young people, are starting to practice divination including witchcraft, consulting mediums, and using instruments of divination such as tarot cards. Witchtok, a subset of TikTok for witches, reports over 35 billion views to date.

“Witchcraft and divination are an explicit invitation to Satan and his minions. Getting rid of demons of divination takes time and is an ugly process. Of course, Jesus wins and eventually the demons are cast out... but do not underestimate the darkness and evil of witchcraft and divination.”

Msgr Rossetti said people are

opening themselves to spiritual danger through occult practices, new-age spirituality, and atheism, “Witchcraft and Satanism is a straight path into the dark world; Jesus is joy and truth and life – He will love you and save you. Satan can only bring death.”

“We have had a number of people who have converted from witchcraft and divination. In more than a few cases, God touched them directly with a powerful grace of conversion and they see the truth,” he added.

Msgr Rossetti will be the keynote speaker at the 40th All Ireland Rosary Rally at Knock on June 7.

[Read the full interview in next week’s edition, May 1](#)

## Lough Derg welcomes relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis as retreat season opens

Pedro Esteve

Lough Derg has received a permanent relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis, the soon-to-be canonised Italian teen known as the “influencer of God.” The relic—a lock of his hair—now rests in St Mary’s Chapel on the island, following a request by Bishop Larry Duffy to the Diocese of Assisi.

Carlo Acutis, who died in 2006 and will be canonised in the near future, is renowned for his Eucharistic devotion and digital outreach. His relics are being venerated globally, with Ireland among the countries hosting several. Lough Derg previously welcomed a relic of his heart during a 2023 tour.

The arrival of the new relic is especially timely as Lough Derg prepares to welcome thousands of pilgrims for its retreat season. One-day guided retreats begin in May, with the famous three-day barefoot, fasting pilgrimage starting May 30. The Papal Nuncio will formally open the season on Sunday, May 4.

### Welcome home



Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin preparing to administer the Sacrament of Baptism (Adult Baptisms as part of the RCIA programme) on Victor Souza, Camila Melo Ryagnani and Patricia Ferreira at the Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne during the Easter Saturday ceremonies. He also administered Confirmation on eleven other candidates. Photo: Mike English.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### An Post seeking stamp ideas for 2027 and beyond

An Post is calling on the public to submit ideas for its 2027 National Stamp Programme, inviting individuals, special interest groups, schools, colleges at home and abroad to help shape the future of Irish stamps.

Submissions are welcome to celebrate any aspect of Irish life and culture – people, history, the arts, nature, and science. All suggestions will then be reviewed, with final selections approved by the Cabinet before production.

In light of the recent criticism from Catholics over the St Patrick’s day stamps, now is a good chance for those who value Ireland’s Christian roots to suggest stamp ideas which highlight the country’s faith history.

Ideas can be sent by email to stampideas@anpost.ie or by FREE-POST to: Stamp Ideas 2027, An Post Stamp Design, EXO Building, North Wall Quay, Dublin 1, D01 W5Y2.

### Restoration of St Oliver Plunkett Shrine begins

Restoration work begins this week on the shrine of St Oliver Plunkett at St Peter’s Church in Drogheda, to mark the 400th anniversary of the saint’s birth and the church’s designations as a Jubilee Church during the Jubilee year of Hope.

The aim of the project is to create a unified, prayerful space that honours the martyred Archbishop of Armagh to enhance the spiritual experience of pilgrims. The designs themselves, according to parish and diocesan bodies, draw inspiration from St Oliver’s Life.

Key features include new tiled floor, improved lighting and displays, new reliquaries, and a brass baldachin symbolising the Holy Spirit. St Oliver’s relic will remain accessible during works, temporarily relocated to the Sacred Heart chapel. Completion is expected by the end of June.

### Le Chéile gathering to support parish pastoral councils in the West

Members of the parish pastoral councils across the dioceses of Clonfert, Galway, Kilmacduagh, and Kilfenora have been invited to a special formation and fellowship event, Le Chéile, taking place Saturday, May 10 from 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Meadow Court Hotel, Loughrea.

Organised as a part of the ongoing renewal of parish life and lay ministry taking place across the country, the event will feature speakers including Patricia Carroll, Director of Mission and Ministry in Dublin; Fr Billy Swan, a priest of the Diocese of Ferns and author; Paul Keogh, principal and youth ministry leader; and Bishop Michael Duignan, who leads all four participating dioceses.

Pre-booking through your local

parish priest or pastoral council is essential.

For more details, contact Fr Gerard McCarthy at [www.anghaill.ie](http://www.anghaill.ie) or [gmccarthy@anghaill.ie](mailto:gmccarthy@anghaill.ie) / 091 565066.

### Rector objects inclusion of Knock Shrine’s land in new ‘land tax’ map

A new draft of the Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) for Co. Mayo includes lands around Knock Basilica. Land appearing on the draft maps will be taken into consideration to be included on the final Mayo County Council RZLT map, which will be published on January 31, 2026.

This land may be subject to the tax in 2026 unless it is a residential property subject to Local Property Tax or qualifies for other exemptions. Fr Richard Gibbons, Rector for Knock Shrine submitted against the inclusion of the Shrine’s land in the RZLT saying it will be used exclusively for pilgrims and visitors to the Shrine.

The submission says the land “will in no way be used as land for housing” as it “is used for the sole benefit of pilgrims and visitors to Ireland’s International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine for religious purposes.”

It also mentions “residential development within the confines of the Knock Shrine boundary and within the entrance boundary is not deemed appropriate, as well as lands adjacent to St Mary’s Retreat Centre, as it would jeopardise expansion plans for our Retreat House”.

### Priest charged over alleged sexual communication with child

A priest from the Diocese of Derry has been suspended from ministry after being charged on attempted sexual communication with a child between April 2 and 17. Fr Edward Gallagher, from Donegal appeared via video link at a special sitting of Derry Magistrates’ Court in Dungannon on April 19.

A defence lawyer said there would be no bail application at this stage, and the priest was remanded in custody to appear in court again by video link on May 1.

A statement from Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown said the diocese “is aware that Fr Edward Gallagher has appeared in court in relation to serious charges... The diocese takes such matters very seriously and as such has, in addition, commenced its own internal investigation,” the bishop said.

“As charges are now before a court, it would not be appropriate for the diocese to comment further until the completion of the criminal proceedings. If anyone has any allegations or concerns regarding child abuse, they should contact the PSNI”.



# Francis' values were rooted in his childhood



**Mary Kenny**

**P**ope Francis was a widely beloved personality, and it was graceful to see even some Unionist politicians pay tribute to the Holy Father. His memoir, *Hope*, co-written with Carlo Musso, was an enjoyable read and brought an insight into Francis's thinking and influences. Growing up in a poor *barrio* of Buenos Aires, he learned to mix with all kinds of people, and that seems to have made him very grounded in everyday life. He loved football and danced the tango, yet he read serious works by the likes of Bertolt Brecht.

I got the impression that, like many Latin Americans,

he wasn't always too keen on the "Yanquis" – even before the era of Donald Trump. Regrettably, he omitted mention of Ireland in his recollections, although he had been here as a younger priest, and as Pontiff, too. Perhaps his welcome, in 2018, was less than the full *Céad Míle Fáilte*: not because the people would have hung back, but because the Irish organisers, and *RTÉ* too, seem to make things as awkward as possible for those who wanted to greet Papa Francis.

Papa Francis does seem to have got along well with President Higgins, however. I wonder if they spoke Spanish together?



Mick Jagger performs during a Rolling Stones concert in London, May 2018. Photo Wikimedia Commons

## The young need weddings the most

With marriage in decline, weddings are surely to be encouraged. Though I'm not sure if the forthcoming nuptials between the world's second-richest man, Jeff Bezos, and his fiancée, Lauren Sanchez, is quite the most realistic template for a matrimonial celebration.

The occasion will take place in Venice, in June, with celebratory events stretching over three days. The cost is said to exceed \$600 millions. All the hotels have been booked out; yachts will be involved as will fleets of water-taxis.

A brilliant wedding can act as a stimulus to more modest versions, but the millions mentioned might also deter ordinary folk from embarking on wedlock.

It is worth remarking on

the maturity of the bride and groom: Mr Bezos – who we have all made rich by our Amazon shopping habits – is 61, while Ms Sanchez is 55. Both have been married before, which now seems no barrier to a white wedding – the Duchess of Sussex set that precedent.

Back in the old days, commentators used to mock Irish country people getting married in their 30s and 40s (having waited to inherit the farm), but they'd be regarded as striplings these days.

Mick Jagger is another groom-in-waiting: aged 81, the old rocker has just announced his engagement to his partner, Melanie Hamrick (a mere child at 37).

Weddings are lovely, but it's the young who need them most; and they need to know, too, that the happiest marriages can start with the simplest ceremonial.

## On the road to sainthood...

**I**t's touching that the last person Pope Francis put on the road to sainthood was Antoni Gaudí, who he declared a "Venerable" just last month.

Gaudí was a deeply

religious man, dedicated to faith and service. He was also the architect of one of the most famous churches in the world, the iconic Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona. It's stunningly original and now a foremost

World Heritage Sites.

But it very nearly destroyed during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Scores of churches in Catalonia were burned to the ground by the Anarchists, and even the much-respected writer George Orwell wanted to see the Sagrada Familia blown to pieces.

It might easily have been reduced to rubble, but Gaudí was a Catalan patriot and perhaps some Catalan anarchist saw something venerating his own culture in the unusual design, and the basilica was thankfully spared. And Gaudí's cause will now go forward, launched by Francis.



View of Sagrada Familia from Placa de Gaudí. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.



## Transgender players and the flashpoint of female sports

After the British Supreme Court ruled that sex is based on biology, and therefore a Transwoman (a person born biologically male) is not a female, there could be a problem arising in Ireland between north and south.

Northern Ireland will be included in British law, and female sports will be limited to biological females. Whereas in the Republic of Ireland, Transgender legislation is more permissive, and Transgender players may not be barred from women's sport.

It seems to me that sport is the real flashpoint of this debate. Personally,

I'm not bothered about unisex toilets – trains, and even some restaurants, have always had loos for all and sundry. Disabled toilets are all gender-inclusive anyway. But in sport there is a real issue of justice involved.

A United Nations study has reported that nearly 900 medals, ranging over 400 sporting contests, have been won by Transgender women in women's sport. As the tennis ace Martina Navratilova has repeatedly pointed out, male-born competitors nearly always have a natural advantage over females – because males and females have different musculature, strength and power – so the contest just isn't fair. The same point about males and females being different is, as it happens, also in the Bible.

# Please support The Iona Institute

The Iona Institute was founded in 2007 and ever since then has promoted the place of marriage and religion in society.

It has featured very prominently in debates about the definition of marriage, abortion, the future of faith-based schools, freedom of religion, and now euthanasia.



David Quinn, CEO, The Iona Institute

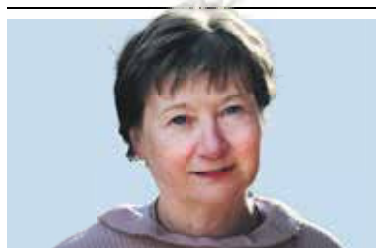
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# The Pope's love of an intense dance and a good argument



Traditional Catholics might have been tempted to let a few plates fly over some of the things Pope Francis said, writes **Martina Purdy**

**P**ope Francis was famous for his love of the Tango – and indeed hundreds of couples performed this Latin dance in St Peter's Square to mark his 78th birthday in 2014. But Francis later confessed he had a preference for the Milonga – a faster, more intense version of this amazing dance, which is perhaps more in line with Francis' personality and his style as pontiff. The Milonga has more suggestive pauses, sudden breaks, and more freedom for improvisation. There's something else appropriate about the Milonga: it can be translated to mean "verbal rebellion" or "argument" – certainly a stark characteristic of the Francis era.

Although Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio took the name of the Twelfth century saint known for "channelling peace", this modern Francis liked to provoke debate, to stir things up. "If the dishes fly," he would tell young engaged couples, "So be it." Of course, he would caution that such displays should end with swift forgiveness and understanding. "Never end the day without making peace," he would add with a grin.

To be honest, many traditional Catholics might have been tempted to let a few plates fly over some of the things Pope Francis would say and do – or was supposed to have said or done. His pontificate came in the age of communication when his every word and deed was analysed and interpreted. The difficulty was that the news media is really only equipped for black and white, and does not do well with subtle shades of grey, especially when it comes to headlines.

## Balance

As a Jesuit, this Pope, a deep thinker, shared complex thoughts that did not fit into neat headlines. The result was media spin and rows over hot button issues. "Some Catholics," said an AI overview on Google, "believe that Pope Francis has caused confusion by making comments that contradict traditional teachings on sex, family and other issues."

In 2016, for example, it was widely reported that Pope Francis believed co-habitation for unmarried couples



Couples dance the tango in celebration of Pope Francis' 78th birthday outside St Peter's Square at the Vatican, December 17, 2014. Several hundred people gathered after the Pope's general audience to dance the tango in an informal event organised on social media. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring.

was acceptable. Surely he was just urging understanding and a kind welcome for couples who were not yet ready to make that commitment?

There were times when a word from the Pope could have cleared up controversies, but instead he chose silence, or what one might call a long Milonga pause. This pope was comfortable with pushing boundaries, questions and mystery. But in an increasingly confused and uncertain world, many Catholics demanded clarity from Christ's vicar on Earth, unwilling to dance to his tune. "I'm sitting this one out," a priest discreetly replied when a Catholic lay person asked for his thoughts on Pope Francis' moves.

**“On the other side of the coin, there were adoring wall flowers who seemed to hang on Francis' every word as if it were gospel”**

Others were not so quiet – quite willing to score his performance, and speaking all kinds of calumny, even challenging the Pope's loyalty and legitimacy. On the other side of the coin, there were adoring wall flowers who seemed to hang on Francis' every word as if it were gospel.

From time to time, Francis reassured traditionalists – for example when he metaphorically stamped his foot and spoke plainly. "Is it right to hire a hitman to solve a problem?" was his frank condemnation of abortion. But at the same time, he danced

**“The Pope instead pointed to the journey of the Magi who found a real child and spoke of the importance of ‘encountering and touching the flesh of our brothers and sisters’”**

a little side-step when it came to US President Joe Biden, who was not challenged publicly on his fanatical support for the "right" to destroy children in the womb. By contrast there was forthright condemnation of Donald Trump's immigration stance. "Who am I to judge?" did not seem to apply to this Republican president.

In fairness this question was his response to a press query years ago about gay priests. "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?" said Pope Francis. His reign was marked by a deep desire for mercy. A close examination of his remarks in that press interview actually reflected Church teaching, but it was used against him by critics who claimed he was more in line with modern culture than church teaching.

## Remarkable

Pope Francis' pontificate began in March 2013 like a good Milonga: passionate, with lots of energy. His approach was refreshingly down to Earth. He did not want to move into the 16th-century Apostolic Palace, and instead of fancy new paper slippers, he preferred his black shoes, mended by the cobbler. He even opened his door to three homeless men and a dog named Marley (after Bob Marley).

"I am a sinner," he memorably declared in an early interview, aligning himself with the rest of flawed humanity. It was perhaps also a prophetic reminder that Francis was no

different from the first pope, Peter, who was chided by the Lord for engaging in 'human thinking'.

Without a doubt, Pope Francis had a remarkable start. While his predecessor, Benedict, struggled to shake off a very unfair description as "God's Rottweiler", Francis was largely embraced by the media. The American magazine *Vanity Fair* described him as "The People's Pontiff". There was real hope that the church, which had fallen into disrepair through scandal, may be rebuilt by this modern Francis who came from the margins.

**“‘Francis,’ he said, ‘told us from the start that he was a sinner. And that means he invited us to pray for his conversion’”**

Naturally there were mis-steps along the way, and some struggled to comprehend the choreography of this Milonga-loving Latino. And, Pope Francis suffered his own passion at times due to "verbal rebellion". The loudest and harshest critics came from within the church. Some powerful and tolerated. But Bishop Strickland in Texas, was eventually removed when he went too far on Francis' legitimacy.

The Pope decided to restrict the Latin Tridentine Mass. There was logic in this, even for a Pope who likes to be inclusive, as the order of mass post-Vatican II is meant to be universal.

Still, there is a sense among critics that Francis did not apply the rules consistently, particularly to those bishops out of line with Church teaching on sexual morality. And he seemed to indulge and elevate his fellow Jesuit, the rather slippery Fr James Martin, who arguably has sown confusion when it comes to celibacy and same sex attraction.

Then there was the debacle over non-liturgical blessings for same-sex couples in December 2023, so soon after the Synod meeting in Rome. The Pope's Milonga moved into a lot of back-tracking. Ultimately it was declared that these blessings had to be "spontaneous".

The Pope was clearly smarting from the row when he declared soon after, on the Feast of Epiphany 2024, that God was not found in "some elegant religious theory". The Pope instead pointed to the journey of the Magi who found a real child and spoke of the importance of "encountering and touching the flesh of our brothers and sisters".

When the 'Francis question' came up over a meal among fellow Catholics soon after, there were questions. Was he simply too liberal, too bent on reforming things he had no business changing, and too quick to water down the wine? One at the table made this observation. "Francis," he said, "told us from the start that he was a sinner. And that means he invited us to pray for his conversion. That's what we should do."

## Treasured

In fairness to Pope Francis, his dance card was well and truly marked by divisions when he came to lead us. Perhaps he felt the best way to resolve issues was a good argument followed by a loving embrace. His *modus operandi* was involving the laity and the clergy in an unprecedented 'Synod on Synodality'. I recall one prominent participant telling me privately that Pope Francis' aim was perhaps too ambitious. "Settling the difficult issues is too much for one Pope or indeed a synod. We need something along the lines of the Council of Trent."

A good Milonga moves quickly, but the church must always wait for the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, it is good to ponder the good that Francis did. His first and last encyclicals are to be treasured and lived: *The Joy of the Gospel* and *Dilexit nos* which encourages devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Indeed, Pope Francis urges a troubled world to counter indifference, greed and war by embracing Christ's infinite love.

We bid adieu to Francis in the year of hope, a hope that does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who like a good Milonga, can move swiftly – in unity, joy and freedom of movement.



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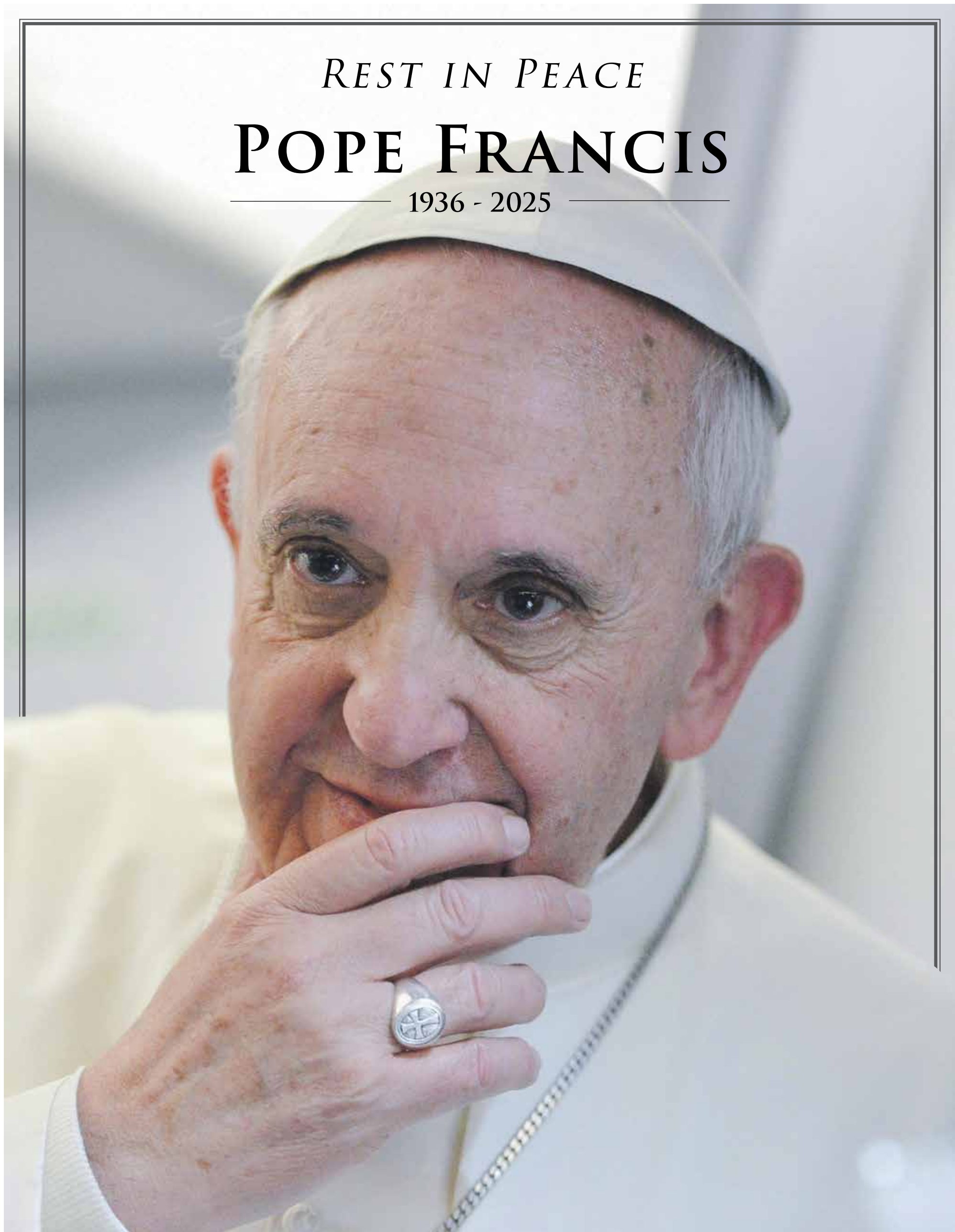
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*REST IN PEACE*

# POPE FRANCIS

1936 - 2025





# Pope Francis in his own words

## Mercy and compassion

"Mercy is the true power that can save humanity and the world from sin and evil. Love makes us draw closer to others, it is the soul of faith, it makes faith fruitful. Without love, faith dies. Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life; all of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers. Nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 2015)

"Do not be afraid of holiness. Do not be afraid to aim high, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not take away our energy, our vitality, or our joy. On the contrary, it is precisely by reaching toward holiness that we become what the Father had in mind when He created us, and we are faithful to our deepest self." (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 2018)

## Social justice and the poor

"A person who thinks only of building walls and not bridges is not Christian. This is not in the Gospel. It is a serious spiritual disease when we start to exclude people, to judge others as unworthy of our help or our love. The true Christian is one who always keeps the doors of their heart open to others, even those they do not understand or agree with." (*Papal plane from Mexico*, February 2016)

"How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? How can we stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality crying out to heaven. A society that does not care for the suffering of the poor is a society that has lost its soul." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013)

## Synodality

"A synodal Church is a Church that listens. Listening is the first step in our journey together. If we listen to one another, and listen to the Holy Spirit, we can walk together on the path of renewal and con-

Pope Francis makes a point as he leads his general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican November 20, 2013. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring



## On Joy and evangelisation

"One of the most serious temptations that stifles bold-

ness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into disillusioned pessimists, sour-faced Christians. Nobody can go off to battle unless they are fully

convinced of victory beforehand. Christian joy is born from knowing that, despite difficulties and trials, we are infinitely loved by God. A

Church that is always complaining, always lamenting, is a Church that has lost her way." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013)

## Global crisis and solidarity

"The pandemic has shown us how interconnected we are. It has shown us that we are all in the same boat, and that no one can be saved alone. We must recognize that our shared vulnerability calls us to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and just world. It is time to rethink our priorities and rebuild our society based on solidarity, care for our common home, and attention to the most vulnerable." *Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2021 (Addressing the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic).*

version. We are called to be a listening Church, one that engages in dialogue and walks with all people, especially the marginalised, the poor, and those who feel excluded." *Address to the Synod of Bishops, October 2023.*

## Faith and spiritual growth

"Faith is born when we experience that we are loved and accompanied by God. It is not simply believing that God exists, but feeling that He is present and acting in our lives. This is the great gift of faith: to know that we are not alone, that He sustains us and will never abandon us. Even in the

darkest nights of life, God walks with us." (*Homily, Easter Vigil*, 2016)

"Christianity is not an ideal to be followed, a philosophy to adhere to, or a moral to be applied. Christianity is an encounter with Jesus Christ that makes us recognise in the flesh of others, especially the suffering, the very presence of God." (*Address to Italian Doctors*, 2014)

## Humility and leadership

"The world tells us to seek success, power, and money. God tells us to seek humility, service, and love. The real power is in service. Leaders—whether in the Church, in government, in business—must never

forget that true greatness is found in humbling oneself, in bending low to wash the feet of others, as Jesus did." (*Homily, Holy Thursday*, 2013)

"We must always guard against the temptation to think we are better than others, to feel self-sufficient. This is a great

danger in the spiritual life. It is when we are most convinced of our own righteousness that we are furthest from God, because pride has closed our hearts to grace. True holiness begins with the humble admission that we are sinners in need of mercy." (*Angelus, January 2014*)

## War

"War is always a defeat for humanity. The world is experiencing the tragedy of war again. We have to ask ourselves: what are we doing? What are we doing as nations? What are we doing as individuals? The cry of the poor, the cry of the excluded, is always the cry of

God. We must be committed to peace, to ending this senseless war, and to restoring the dignity of every human being." *General Audience, March 2, 2022. (Pope Francis condemned the war in Ukraine and reiterated his message of peace and the need for global leaders to work toward reconciliation and peace.)*

## Love

"Love is more than a feeling or an emotion—it is an action. To love means to serve, to give oneself, to put others before ourselves. The world today tells us to think only of ourselves, of what we can gain, of what makes us comfortable. But Jesus shows us another way: true joy is found in loving others, especially the weak and the forgotten." (*Homily, World Meeting of Families*, 2015)

## Environment and responsibility

"We must never forget that the environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we do not act now, we risk leaving future generations a planet that is devastated, barren, and incapable of sustaining life. A world in which profit is placed above the dignity of people and the health of the earth is a world heading toward destruction. We are called to be stewards, not exploiters, of creation." (*Laudato Si'*, 2015)

"The Earth does not belong to us; we are merely its caretakers. Every action we take must be done with the awareness that it affects future generations. When we destroy forests, pollute rivers, or fill the seas with plastic, we are not just harming nature—we are sinning against God, who entrusted us with this world as a gift." (*Speech to Environmental Scientists*, 2019)

## Forgiveness and reconciliation

"The Lord never tires of forgiving—never! It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. But when we turn to Him with a sincere heart, His mercy always reaches us. The Church must be a place where mercy is freely given, not a place of harsh judgment. If we do not understand this, we fail to grasp the heart of the Gospel." (*Homily, Vatican's Saint Martha guesthouse chapel*, March 2014)



# Pope Francis championed women to key Church leadership roles



The Pope wanted to include women in decision-making at the highest level, including formally consulting them about the selection of bishops, writes **Breda O'Brien**

**T**he role of women in the Church is contentious, even among Catholic women. Some believe that women will never be truly equal in the Church unless they are admitted to the ordained priesthood.

Some emphasise women's primary roles within family and parish settings. Others advocate for greater inclusion of women's voices at all levels of the Church but caution that prioritising ordination could perpetuate clericalism, where ordination is equated with power rather than service.

Pope Francis belonged to the latter category. In late 2024, in an address to fellow Jesuits from Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, he said, "The Church is woman," in response to a question about "the difficulty of giving women a more just and adequate place in the Church."

The Pope said he did not want to limit the discussion of women's roles to the question of ministry. He was trying to bring "more and more women into the Vatican with roles of higher and higher responsibility."

"Things are changing," he continued. "You can see and feel it."

## Responsibility

The Pope has appointed more than 20 women to important roles of responsibility within the Vatican. The latest was the promotion of Sr Raffaella Petrini (56) an Italian nun, from second-in-command to the first woman governor of the Vatican City State. She will also be the President of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State, and



Pope Francis greets Sr Raffaella Petrini, an Italian member of the US-based Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, at the Vatican on December 3, 2015. The Pope named Sr Petrini secretary-general of the office governing Vatican City State. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media.

in that role, will rank higher than the six Cardinals who are members of the Commission.

She is the second religious sister to outrank Cardinals; the first was Sr Simona Brambilla, prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. This is the first time in history that women have held higher positions in the Vatican than men.

**“He also appointed women who could vote at the Synod on Synodality, another first”**

Many of the women appointed by Francis are religious sisters but not all. Francesca Di Giovanni is an Italian lawyer who has

worked in the Vatican Secretariat of State since 1993. In 2020, she was the first woman or indeed, layperson, to be appointed as an Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs in the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State, an important diplomatic post.

Other laywomen play important roles in the Vatican, including six women appointed in 2020 to the 15-member Council for the Economy, which oversees Vatican finances. Ruth Kelly, a former UK minister in Labour governments under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, is one of them.

He also appointed women who could vote at the Synod on Synodality, another first. This included two Irish women, Sr Patricia Murray IBVM (Loreto Sisters) and Sr Mary Teresa Barron OLA (Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles).

## Importance

Pope Francis's strategy seems clear. He wanted to

**“Pope Francis has emphasised developing a theology of women that respects difference but also acknowledges what he calls the ‘genius of women’”**

**“There are many underutilised ways in which women could exercise leadership at different levels, from diocesan chancellors to theological experts. It will be part of Francis' legacy that he has opened the door to more women assuming these roles”**

include women in decision-making at the highest level, including formally consulting them about the selection of bishops.

However, to see Pope Francis as someone whose focus is simply inserting women into important roles is to miss a great deal.

**“One of his first actions as Pope was to visit Lampedusa to show solidarity with migrants”**

The most important woman in Pope Francis' life may have been his grandmother. He spoke fondly of her on many occasions, including when she chased a thief with a broom from the shop they owned. More importantly, his *nonna* (grandmother) Rosa taught him his prayers and to love

God. He said that he “had the grace to grow up in a family where faith was lived in a simple and concrete way; but it was above all my grandmother, my father's mother, who marked my path of faith.” He kept what he called her testament of faith in his breviary, which was a prayer for all her grandchildren.

Her difficult journey from Italy to settle in Argentina also shaped his love and concern for migrants. One of his first actions as Pope was to visit Lampedusa to show solidarity with migrants attempting to cross into Europe.

Pope Francis has emphasised developing a theology of women that respects difference but also acknowledges what he calls the “genius of women.”

## Principles

Pope Francis has frequently referenced the Petrine and Marian dimensions of the Church, a concept initially articulated by Hans Urs von Balthasar. In essence, the

Marian principle is linked to Mary, the mother of Jesus, symbolising the Church's receptive, nurturing, and spiritual nature. The Petrine principle, tied to Peter, supports the Church's institutional identity, highlighting apostolic continuity and hierarchical structure. The two principles are inseparable. Pope Francis stresses that the Marian principle is foundational: the Petrine (institutional) dimension cannot exist without the Marian (spiritual) dimension.

Some women bristle at this distinction, seeing it as just another way to exclude women from governance. But Pope Francis actively encouraged women in leadership. There are many underutilised ways in which women could exercise leadership at different levels, from diocesan chancellors to theological experts. It will be part of Francis' legacy that he has opened the door to more women assuming these roles.



# Francis was the unpredictable pope who emphasised mercy



David Quinn

**W**hen Jorge Mario Bergoglio first appeared on the balcony of St Peter's in March, 2013, we knew we were going to be dealing with a different style of papacy. He appeared before the world in simple white, rather than the more ornate vestments of his predecessors and gave the crowd below a simple wave. He moved out of the papal apartments into more simple rooms in the hotel built on the grounds of Vatican City. He chose a more modest car to be driven about in. All in all, he was trying to set a new tone for the papacy.

It continued more or less this way for the duration of his pontificate. He did things his own way. He was no particular respecter of traditional ways of doing things if he believed these were getting in the way of his vision for the Church. This was especially in evidence in how he chose cardinals. Traditionally, the bishop of a big or historically important diocese would almost automatically get a red hat, for example, Los Angeles in the US, or Milan in Italy.

## Expectation

Instead, Pope Francis preferred to bestow red hats on bishops from the far-flung places of the Church, where in some cases there are very few Catholics. Therefore, we have seen bishops from countries such as Mongolia, or Tonga, or Singapore or Morocco elevated to the College of Cardinals. Francis liked to surprise people.

This means it is not at all easy to predict who might be the next pope. Many of the voting age cardinals will not know each other very well, and many will have become cardinals totally against their expectations. They will have expected to be thinking mainly about the Church in their own areas, rather than universally. When

**“Pope Francis seemed to believe that the Church has often been too quick to offer criticism and that its spirituality and moral advice have been too punitive in approach”**



Pope Francis arrives to celebrate a Mass in the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican April 23, 2013, just over a month after he was elected Pope. Dozens of cardinals living in Rome or visiting the Vatican joined the Pope in the chapel on the feast of St George, the martyr. The feast is the Pope's name day as he was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters.

they enter the Conclave, they will look around at each other perhaps not sure which of them would make the best candidate to succeed Francis.

**“He was the first ever pope from South America, and therefore also the first Argentinian pope”**

We might think that the next pontiff will be like Francis given that he has selected 80% of those of voting age. But things might not transpire that way given the very unusual make-up of the current College of Cardinals.

One of the keys to understanding Pope Francis was simply to understand his background, as is the case with all of us. He was the first ever pope from South America, and therefore also the first Argentinian pope ever. He was born in 1936, the son of Italian immigrants. Argentina used to be a common destination for immigrants from Europe. It seemed to be a country going places. Instead, it became a country of failed economic promise

and would lurch from populist, democratically elected leaders like Juan Peron who was Argentina's president from 1946 until 1955, that is, from the time when Pope Francis was 10 until he was 19.

Peron was for the people, but his economic policies, and those associated with 'Peronism' – still a very strong political force in Argentina – have rarely benefited the country as a whole. Peron came to power for a final time from 1973 until 1974 when he died. The military took over the country again, leading to a very bloody crackdown on opponents.

## Leadership

This coincided with Jorge Mario Bergoglio taking over the running of the Jesuit order in Argentina, an extraordinarily difficult period to be at the helm.

Pope Francis was a typical South American of his era in that he seemed suspicious of the United States and was quite 'Peronist' in his own style of leadership as pope. He seemed drawn to Liberation Theology, which tried to place the Church on the side of the poor (and was criticised by John Paul II for having what he believed were Marxist leanings). He also had a strong anti-clericalist streak, which is no harm, and seemed to actively dislike the authoritarian strain that can easily exist within Catholicism, and which he often seemed to identify with conservatism in general.

He had a particularly strong dislike for what he called 'rigid' priests, who were overly-clericalist, stiff in their personal style, overly concerned in his view with wearing the correct

vestments and with liturgical 'correctness', and were too concerned with the rules at the expense of the pastoral. He seemed to dislike the Latin Mass.

But sometimes I wondered if he was trying to correct a problem that was more prevalent in the Argentina of his youth, or indeed in the Ireland of the same time because the rigid, authoritarian priest is overwhelmingly a thing of the past, in Western countries at least. The problem today is less like to be rigidity, and is more like to be 'laxism', a sort of 'I'm ok, you're ok' approach to moral theology.

I think if there is one thing I most strongly associate with the pontificate of Pope Francis it is his emphasis on mercy and what he called 'accompaniment'.

**“In working towards the goal of moral perfection, we need the grace of God”**

Christianity sets very high moral standards for people and as someone said to me once, when a religion has very high standards that everyone will fail to meet at some stage, then you need plenty of mercy and plenty of forgiveness.

Jesus said we had to be "perfect, as our Father in Heaven is perfect". Therefore, the Christian life is about working towards that goal in the same way an athlete seeks to become as good as they possible can in

their own sport. In working towards the goal of moral perfection, we need the grace of God, and not even the saints get all the way there, although they come closer than most, which is why they are recognised as saints. Many saints are, of course, never formally recognised as such. You might even know a few such people yourself. Saints are more common than we think.

## Guidance

But all of those saints had many stumbles on the way, and ideally would have had someone they could turn to for spiritual guidance, someone who knew when to urge them on, when they needed encouragement and when they needed some criticism, all the things a good coach does when training an athlete.

Pope Francis seemed to believe that the Church has often been too quick to offer

criticism and that its spirituality and moral advice have been too punitive in approach.

There is a delicate balance to be struck here. What you don't want to do is make it seem as if the moral standards of Christianity are impossible to live up to, and at the same time you don't want to give the impression that they don't really matter and that God will always forgive you, no matter what. He will forgive you if you seek forgiveness and you have a purpose of amendment. This is the very basic of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The need for the Church, and for individual Christians, to strike the right balance in this regard is the lesson of the pontificate of Pope Francis that has made the strongest impression on me. I think it is the main lesson he wanted us to draw from his papacy. May he Rest in Peace.

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# The Pope in Ireland

Pope Francis prays in front of a candle in memory of victims of sexual abuse as he visits St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 25. Sexual and physical abuse by priests and religious and the scandal of its cover-up by church authorities thrive in countries where the Catholic Church is "elitist and clericalist," Pope Francis told Jesuits Aug. 25 in Dublin. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis meets with Jesuits in Dublin Aug. 25. In remarks at the meeting, the pope said sexual and physical abuse by clerics and cover-up by church authorities thrive in countries where the Catholic Church is "elitist and clericalist." The pope's comments were released by the Jesuit journal La Civiltà Cattolica Sept. 13. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media



Pope Francis arrives to celebrate Mass at Phoenix Park in Dublin Aug. 26. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis celebrates Mass at Phoenix Park in Dublin. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring

Pope Francis arrives to celebrate Mass at Phoenix Park. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis prays as he visits the Chapel of the Apparitions at the Knock Shrine. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope celebrates mass at Phoenix Park. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring





Worshippers wait for Pope Francis to celebrate Mass at Phoenix Park. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Wind blows Pope Francis' mantle as he speaks at the Knock Shrine in Knock, Ireland, Aug. 26. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



People wait to see Pope Francis during his visit to the Knock Shrine. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greets the crowd as he visits the Knock Shrine. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis holds a candle as he greets children while visiting the Chapel of the Apparitions at the Knock Shrine in Knock. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greets the crowd as he visits the Knock Shrine. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greet a local parishioner as he visits the Chapel of the Apparitions at the Knock Shrine in Knock. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



People wait to see Pope Francis during his visit to the Knock Shrine. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring





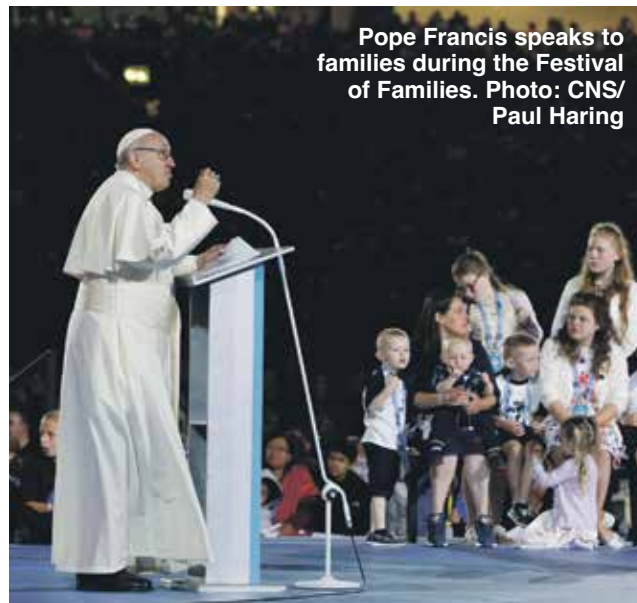
Pope Francis attends the Festival of Families in Croke Park stadium in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis attends the Festival of Families in Croke Park stadium in Dublin. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



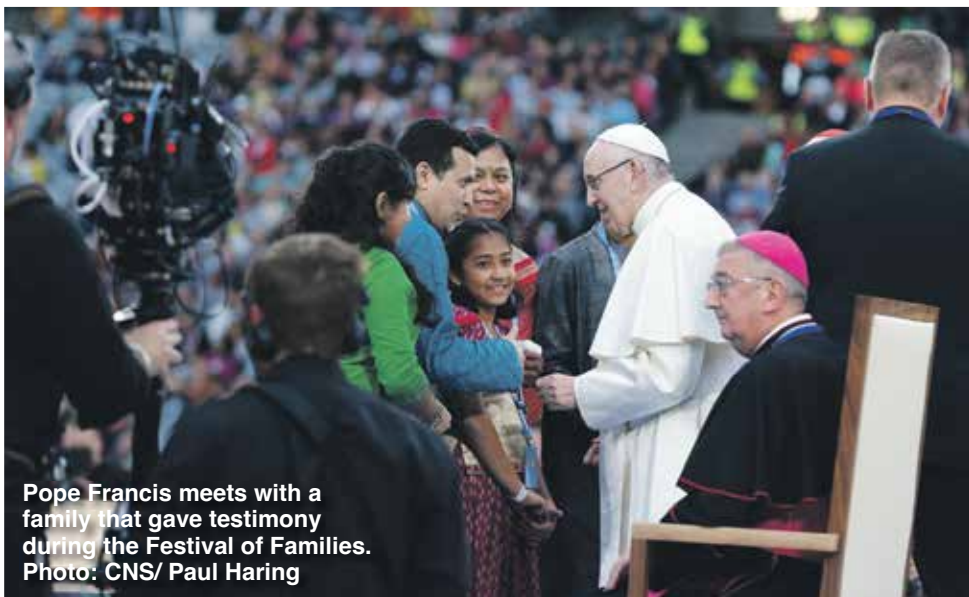
Pope Francis greets children during the Festival of Families in Croke Park stadium. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis speaks to families during the Festival of Families. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis attends the Festival of Families. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



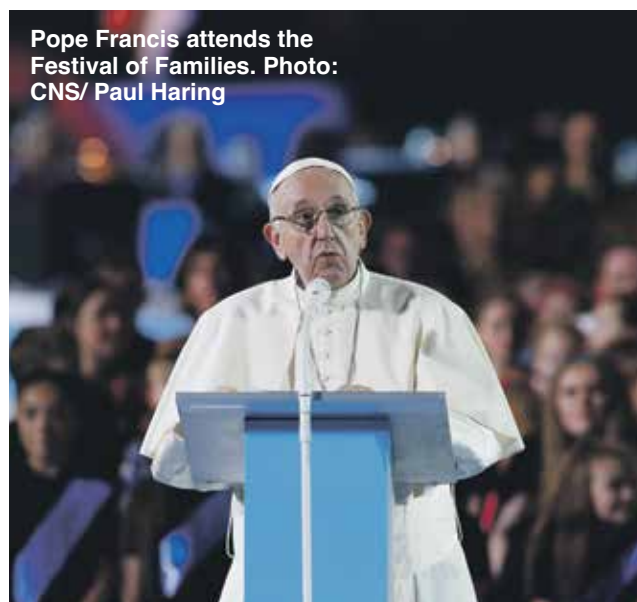
Pope Francis meets with a family that gave testimony during the Festival of Families. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis attends the Festival of Families. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Family members attend the Festival of Families Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis attends the Festival of Families. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis visits the Capuchin Fathers' day centre for homeless families in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Alessia Giuliani





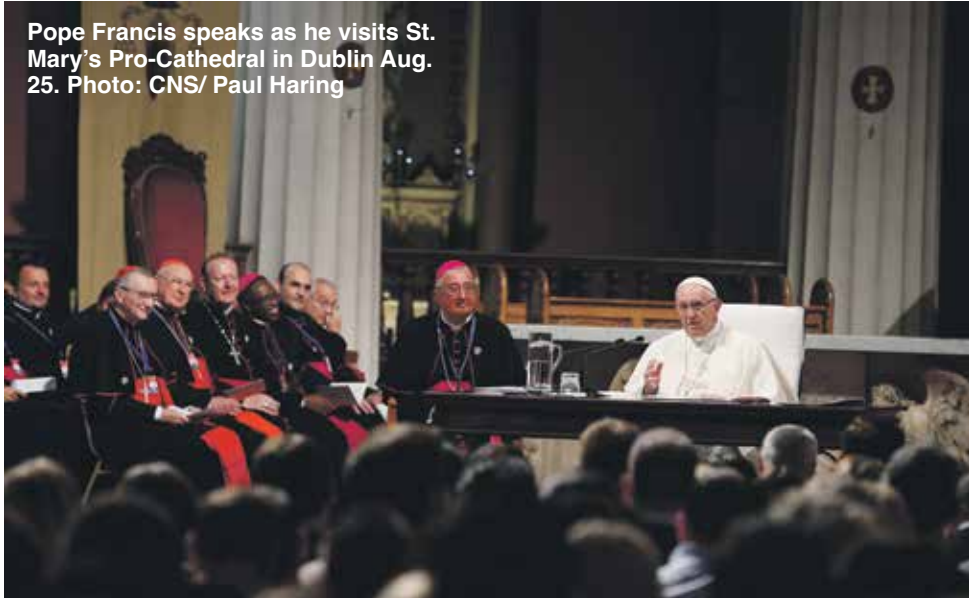
Pope Francis visits the Capuchin Fathers' day centre for homeless families. Photo: CNS/ Alessia Giuliani



Pope Francis visits the Capuchin Fathers' day centre for homeless families. Photo: CNS/ Alessia Giuliani



Pope Francis prays in front of a candle in memory of victims of sexual abuse as he visits St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis speaks as he visits St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greets a recently married couple as he visits St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis prepares to place flowers near a candle in memory of victims of sexual abuse as he visits St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis gives a thumbs-up to supporters at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greets Leo Varadkar, prime minister of Ireland, during a meeting with authorities, civil society leaders and members of the diplomatic corps in Dublin Castle in Dublin Aug. 25. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis greets Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin as he arrives at the international airport in Dublin Aug. 25. The pope is attending the World Meeting of Families in Dublin and is scheduled to meet with survivors of clerical sexual abuse. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



Pope Francis waves as he walks to his car upon arriving at the international airport in Dublin Aug. 25. The pope is attending the World Meeting of Families in Dublin and is scheduled to meet with survivors of clerical sexual abuse. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring



# Pope Francis' legacy of care for creation lives on



Lorna Gold

**P**ope Francis's passing comes during the 10th anniversary of the publication of his groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato Si'* – On Care for our Common Home – which examined Catholic environmental teaching in the light of today's planetary crisis. Over the past 10 years, Pope Francis's leadership has borne initiatives that have transformed the Catholic Church into a powerful force for action on the planetary crisis and have had an influence far beyond the Church itself.

From the start Pope Francis, in choosing the name Francis of Assisi, indicated that his papacy would have a strong focus on the themes of environmental action and peace. No Pope had ever before chosen to take the name Francis in the 800 years since the saint was alive. Taking that name came with a certain weight of responsibility to emulate a saint revered by so many and known for his simple living and fraternal love – in stark contrast with the perceived opulence of the Vatican. Taking the name Francis raised expectations that he would use his papacy to speak to the pressing issues of environmental destruction, global inequality and violence.

## Development

It was not too long into his papacy that word spread that an environmental encyclical or letter was under development. Many prominent Catholic theologians and scientists were deeply involved in the drafting process, ensuring that the new Papal document was at once consistent with Catholic teaching and the most up to date science, especially on climate change. The outcome was *'Laudato*



Pope Francis greets Lorna Gold, recently named new executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, during a private audience at the Vatican on January 30, 2025. Photo: OSV News/Vatican Media via CPP.

*Si'* – which means 'Praise Be' – taken from the first line of St Francis most famous poem, the Canticle of Creation. The by-line was 'On Care for our Common Home' – recalling the *Brundland Commission Report Our Common Future* which addressed very similar themes almost 40 years previously.

**“Since then, environmental action in the Catholic Church has continued to grow”**

*Laudato Si'* was published to great acclaim in May 2015 ahead of negotiations for the Paris agreement in May 2015, and Pope Francis engaged in diplomacy to ensure the accord's passage and key inclusion of a reference to keeping global temperatures below the threshold of 1.5C. This inclusion has had a significant impact on ensuring climate ambition since. The agreement passed, and the Holy See is now a full party to

it and an active player in seeking to raise ambition amongst countries to honour their commitments made in Paris.

Since then, environmental action in the Catholic Church has continued to grow. The Laudato Si' Action Platform, which was launched by Pope Francis, has spurred Catholic institutions to develop practical plans for action on ecology, touching 20 million people to date and engaging a wide range of significant Catholic institutions worldwide in concrete commitments to sustainability. Care for creation has become an increasingly important part of how Catholics live their faith. The ecumenical Season of Creation and annual Laudato Si' Week, which are co-sponsored by the Vatican, and World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation are examples of how the message is now mainstream in Catholic faith life, for which Pope Francis issued annual messages, engage millions of people each year in prayer and action for our common home on these occasions.

## Inspiration

Along the way Pope Francis inspired many other faiths leaders and faithful to take action for creation, breathing new life into the global 'faith environment' movement which is a key avenue

**“Each encounter with him has been very special and filled me with hope and courage. He always came over as someone incredible, sharp but also humble”**

also for inter-faith cooperation and dialogue. Faith-led action on environment has increased significantly since 2015. In 2021 Pope Francis hosted 50 faith leaders at the Vatican ahead of COP21 in Glasgow which led to a groundbreaking multi-faith statement. Other significant developments include including the by publication of *Al Mizan*, which is known as the 'Muslim Laudato Si'.

**“The organisation's documentary featuring Pope Francis and frontline leaders has been seen by well over 10 million people”**

*Laudato Si'* was also the inspiration which launched the Global Catholic Climate Movement, renamed Laudato Si' Movement by Pope Francis himself in 2020. This global movement as trained over 20,000 environmental leaders (Laudato Si' Anima-

tors) across 140 countries to lead community-based initiatives within the Church. It now has flourishing chapters across the globe and is active on many fronts greening the Church from the bottom up and joining climate campaigns. The organisation's documentary featuring Pope Francis and frontline leaders has been seen by well over 10 million people and is free to watch on YouTube. It was premiered here in Ireland by President Michael D Higgins in the Aras in November 2022.

## Legacy

Over the past decade I have been blessed to meet with Pope Francis on many occasions to discuss *Laudato Si'*, most recently in late January on the announcement of my appointment as the new leader of Laudato Si' Movement. Each encounter with him has been very special and filled me with hope and courage. He always came over as someone incredible, sharp but also humble. Despite his growing frailty he always had a smile, a joke (this time

about my Italian!) and a word of encouragement. His parting words to me in January *"Vai avanti"* – 'keep going' as he squeezed my hand tight – will now stay with me forever.

**“He underscored that care for creation is an integral part of the Christian vocation”**

Pope Francis contribution to this work will be sorely missed. Pope Francis has been a global leader on the environment. However, caring for the environment has been embedded in Catholic teaching and there is a new emphasis on this aspect of faith in light of the global ecological crisis. He underscored that care for creation is an integral part of the Christian vocation and a shared responsibility to the poor and future generations. It is now a legacy he has left for us to continue.

**i** Dr Lorna Gold is the Executive Director for the Laudato Si' Movement.

**“The Laudato Si' Action Platform, which was launched by Pope Francis, has spurred Catholic institutions to develop practical plans for action on ecology”**



# Humility of Pope Francis was palpable



It seemed very clear that there was joy and serenity in his heart, despite knowing the magnitude of the task writes **Nuala O'Loan**

**T**he election of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013, following the unprecedented retirement of the scholarly, gentle, spiritual Pope Benedict came as a huge surprise to many of us.

In my lifetime there have been seven popes: Pius XII, St John XXIII, St Paul VI, St John Paul I, St John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. Each unique, with their charisms, their strengths and their weaknesses – for popes are human too.

Pope Francis, this Jesuit, Argentinian, Cardinal Archbishop, was, from the very moment of his election, so very different. His humility was palpable: he asked for people's prayers for Pope Benedict and for himself, even before he gave his first papal blessing. He was not interested in pomp and circumstances. He had lived in a small apartment as archbishop, travelled on public transport, cooked for himself.

He caught the bus back with the cardinals from the conclave which elected him, he paid his own hotel bill. He refused to ride in a big limou-

sine, preferring a little Fiat – which seemed such a tiny car for such a big man!

He was a simple man, and he seemed to want to continue to be a simple man. That, however, was never going to be possible.

I met him in October 2013 at a papal audience. I watched him as he made his way around St Peter's Square – this big burly man, reaching out to people, his white robe not quite covering his black trousers and his battered old black shoes. The shoes made such an impression on me. They were so different from the elegant red shoes worn by his predecessors. Even then he had some difficulty walking, and, as I watched, I pondered on the long, arduous and often difficult journey he had made to that day in St Peter's Square. As he stopped to speak to me, taking my hand in a warm, firm grasp and smiling at me, he said "Please pray for me." It seemed very clear that there was joy and serenity in his heart, even as he was so aware of the magnitude of the task God had given him

## Whirlwind

Francis came as a whirlwind to the Church. His words blunt and uncompromising, there was an urgency to all that he tried to do. He reached out, hands spread wide to all God's people, and to his whole world. He urged us, in turn, to reach out to each other's very souls, to respond with real love, to see Christ in all whom we meet – the poor, the lonely, the isolated, the shunned, the marginalised, the terrified. He challenged constantly saying things like, "You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That is how prayer works!" and "If your prayer life is boring, you're focusing on yourself, not Jesus, not the needy."

Living as simply as he could, he told us to care for our sister,

Mother Earth, saying that "We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will" yet, "The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the power to work together in building our common home."

He worked on the international front, navigating the perilous seas of global indifference and corruption, seeking to build anew the Church of Christ in countries like China where there was such hostility, to unite where division existed, to seek peace where war was ravaging the world, to encourage the world to come to know its Creator and Redeemer. Most recently in South East Asia he joined Muslim leaders creating a joint declaration condemning religious based violence. Ever assertive, he condemned abortion in Belgium calling it "homicide" and referring to doctors who conduct abortions as "contract killers."

**"He challenged priests to be true shepherds to their flocks, to bring the Church to the people, if the people would not come to the Church"**

Simultaneously he embarked on fundamental reform of the Roman Curia and of the structures at the top of the Church, trying to root out clericalism in all its forms, corruption profligacy and waste.

He sought to introduce effective due process and accountability, especially in relation to the safeguarding of the vulnerable, financial matters and the best possible use of Church and Vatican resources.

He challenged priests to be true shepherds to their flocks, to bring the Church to the people, if the people would not come to the Church. He worked consistently to bring us all to understand that we must do all that we do in the name of and for the Lord and that we must do it as the People of God. That is what the Synod on Synodality was about: "a journey together by everyone in the Church during which we listen to the Holy Spirit"... "to hear God's voice, to sense his presence, to witness his passage and his breath of life" It is work in progress. Inevitably, much remains to be done.

He involved the laity further in important roles. Acknowledging the importance of women to the Church, he appointed them to positions which would previously have been closed to them. There is now a woman at the head of a Dicastery, a position which could previously only be held by a Cardinal. Other women hold positions in the Vatican previously reserved to clerics. In promoting women in this way Francis gave women, and especially religious sisters, real respect. He listened to calls for change, ever careful to listen also to the Spirit.

## Resistance

He constantly encountered resistance and attack, even from within the Church, some of it public, some secret. These last years of his earthly journey must have been so very challenging, his responsibili-

ties unparalleled, and, but for the Lord, it must have been in some ways a very lonely road.

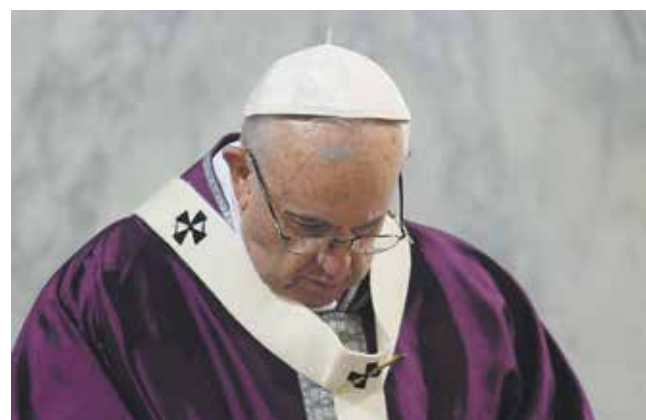
**"May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever"**

Francis, an old man of 76 when he became Pope, laboured tirelessly in the great vineyard of the Lord. In just 12 short years he achieved a great deal. It seems to me that when we look back at this papacy we will see a man who knew his time was limited and, working on many fronts, cut through so much of what was negative,

corrosive, distorted and damaging to the Church, moving its focus back towards the fundamental acts of loving God and loving one another – demanding of every one of us that we see the face of Christ in each of His children and reach out to caress that face, no matter whether the person is dirty, diseased or decrepit, a drug addict, a criminal, a hypocrite. He was always conscious that we are all in need of mercy.

One of Francis's last acts was to declare the year 2025 as a Jubilee of Hope, praying "May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever."

His days of waiting and working are done May the angels lead him into paradise, to the presence of the Lord whom he loved so much, and by whom he knew that he was much loved.



Pope Francis is pictured with ashes on his forehead during Ash Wednesday Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome, February 14, 2018. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

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# A Pope who went to the margins



Francis challenged the Church and the world to focus on those most in need, writes Michael Kelly

When Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope in 1978 taking the name John Paul II, he joked with the Roman crowd that the cardinals had called him *da un paese lontano* – from a faraway country. After all, the Archbishop of Kraków had come from behind the ‘iron curtain’ and was the first non-Italian Pope since 1523.

As Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio appeared on the loggia of St Peter’s as Pope Francis in 2013, the sentiments of the saintly Polish Pontiff were undoubtedly in his mind when he remarked that in electing Rome’s new bishop “it seems that my brother cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one...but here we are!”

## Affection

Whether as priest, bishop, cardinal or Pope, Francis has always displayed a particular affection for the existential margins of society and the Church.

Francis’ fellow Jesuit, Fr Karl Rahner, saw in the margins the inherent human experience of openness to transcendence at the very edges of conscious awareness.

Back in Argentina, Fr Bergoglio discerned early in his ministry that God was acutely present on the margins – and crucially, in the marginalised. That’s why when I visited the slums of Buenos Aires last summer, it was the people in the soup kitchens who were beaming from ear-to-ear with stories about how he had touched their lives when he was archbishop there before becoming Pope.

Within days of his election as Bishop of Rome, Francis was on his hands and knees in Rebibbia prison on the outskirts of the eternal city washing the feet of criminals on Holy Thursday. To some, it was a show of ostentatious humility – but those who knew Francis knew that it was part of what he himself understood as a revolution of tenderness. Not only did he wash the feet of these people judged by society to be undesirable and unclean, he kissed their feet in obedience to the *mandatum* of Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve.

**“His encounters with the poor in the villas miserias instilled in him a deep commitment to social justice and solidarity”**

To understand Pope Francis’ focus on the existential margins, one must consider his background. He is the first Pope from Latin America, and the first Jesuit Pope. His experiences in Buenos Aires, where he witnessed extreme poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, profoundly shaped his worldview. His encounters with the poor in the *villas miserias* instilled in him a deep commitment to social justice and solidarity.

In reaching out to the margins, Francis wasn’t trying to be some kind of social worker on steroids. He knew that he could not fix the complex problems



Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer on March 7, 2021, at Hosh al-Bieaa, the church square, in Mosul, Iraq, for the victims of the ISIS war. Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches were all destroyed in the war between 2014 and 2017. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

of many of the people encountered, but he knew he could listen to them, let them know that they had inherent value and crucially show to the rest of the world that those discarded in our ‘throw away culture’ should actually be at the centre of our concerns.

## Field hospital

Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasised the idea of the Church as a ‘field hospital’ that must go out to where people are suffering. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), his apostolic exhortation on the joy of the Gospel, he explicitly calls for a missionary Church that moves beyond self-referential concerns and actively engages with the world: “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.”

One of the defining aspects of Pope Francis’ papacy was his advocacy for the poor. He frequently criticised what he calls the ‘globalisation of indifference’, urging Catholics to recognise the dignity of those who are marginalised.

But, his focus on the margins was not limited to social issues: he also sought to bring those who feel alienated from the Church back into its fold. This includes divorced and remarried Catholics, gay and lesbian Catholics and other who feel unwelcome within traditional ecclesial structures.

**“Francis believes that the Church is reformed from the margins, and that is why he sought to bring these voices to the body that chooses the Pope”**

His 2016 apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, called for a more pastoral and less legalistic approach to family life. He has encouraged dialogue and accompaniment rather than rigid enforcement of doctrinal rules, arguing that the Church

must be a place of mercy and healing rather than judgment.

Francis’ interest in the margins was also evident in the choice of the men who would elect his successor. Under his careful stewardship, the College of Cardinals has gained new members from diverse places like Mongolia and Togo where the Catholic population is tiny while huge sees like Los Angeles have been without a red hat. Francis believes that the Church is reformed from the margins, and that is why he sought to bring these voices to the body that chooses the Pope.

## Travel

Travel was another aspect of his papacy where he favoured the margins. He travelled to northern Iraq to be with the Christian community there who had survived the Islamic State genocide, and to Papua New Guinea to give a shot in the arm to an emerging Catholic community.

Despite his widespread popularity, Pope Francis’ focus on the margins was not without opposition. Some critics argued that his openness to dialogue and his emphasis on pastoral care risked diluting doctrine. Others saw his blistering critiques of capitalism

and calls for social justice as overly political.

Pope Francis’ defenders insist that his focus on the existential margins was never a political strategy, but a deeply theological and pastoral vision rooted in the Gospel. By prioritising the poor, the outcast, and those who feel alienated from the Church, he was attempting to make Catholicism more inclusive and mission-driven.

His papacy challenged both the Church and the world to move beyond self-interest and embrace a culture of encounter, mercy, and solidarity.

As Pope Francis himself has said: “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open...Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community.”

In a time of division and exclusion, Pope Francis’ insistence on looking to the margins offered a powerful reminder of the Gospel’s radical call to love, serve, and uplift those most in need.

**i** Michael Kelly is a former Editor of The Irish Catholic and currently Director of Public Affairs for the papal charity Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland.

**“His papacy challenged both the Church and the world to move beyond self-interest and embrace a culture of encounter, mercy, and solidarity”**



# POPE FRANCIS

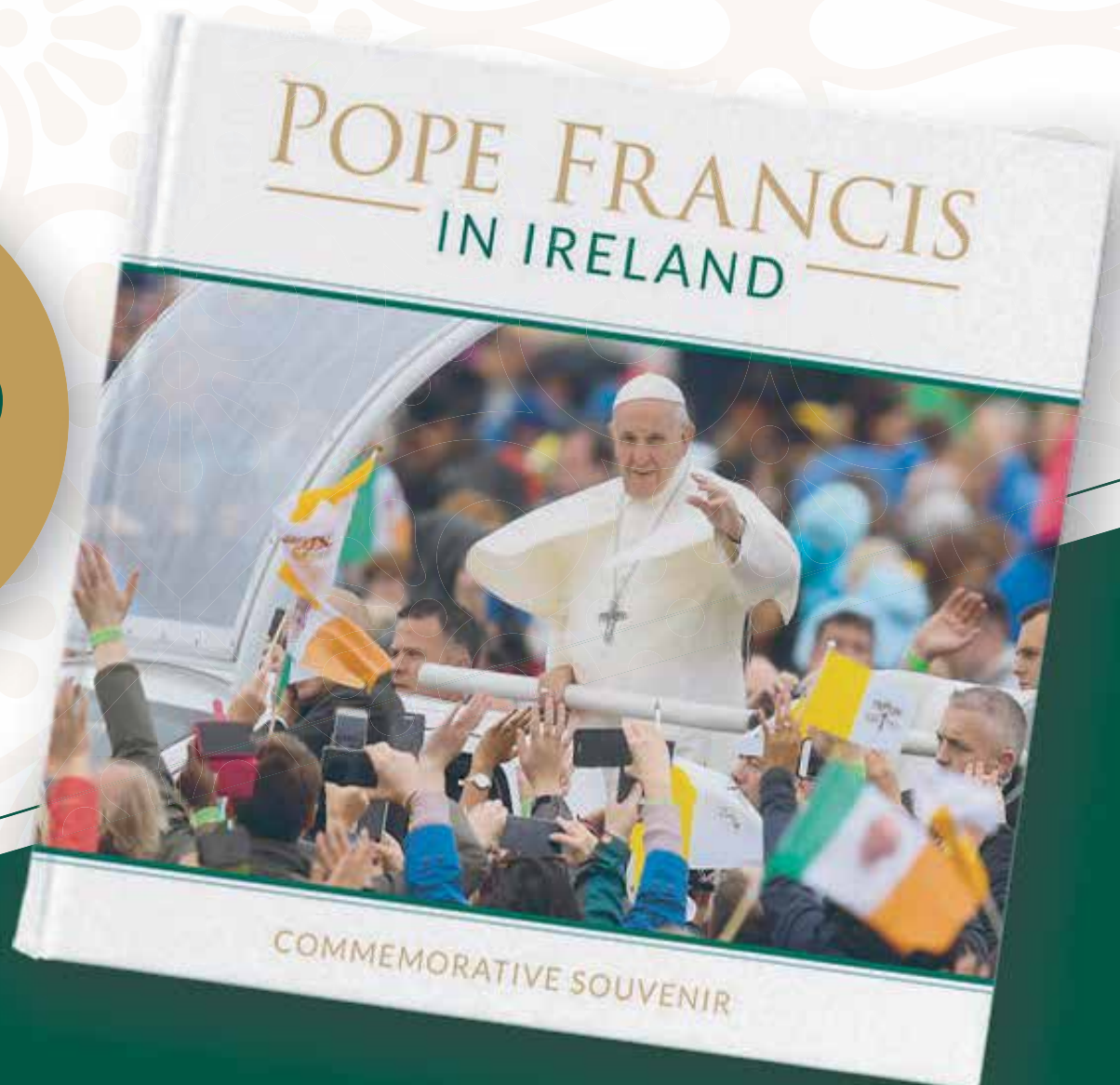
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# Pope Francis' pontificate: A timeline

## 2013

**March 13 – Pope Francis is elected:** Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is elected pope on the second day of the conclave becoming the first Pope from the Southern Hemisphere and the first non-European elected in almost 1,300 years. The Jesuit was also the first member of his order to be elected Pope, and the first member of any religious order elected in nearly two centuries.

**March 19 –** The papal inauguration of Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica in Rome to a crowd ranging from 150,000 to 200,000 people.

**June 29 – *Lumen Fidei* (the light of faith):** Encyclical. Focuses on the importance of faith in the modern world. "The light of Faith: this is how the Church's tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus," Pope Francis writes. "In John's Gospel, Christ says of himself: 'I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.'"

**July 8 – First trip out of Rome to Lampedusa:** Pope Francis makes his first trip outside of Rome, choosing to go to the Italian island of Lampedusa to underline the plight of migrants crossing the Mediterranean and the countless lives lost at sea.

**July 22-29 – Trip to Brazil for World Youth Day:** The first international trip of the newly elected pope.

**November 24 – *Evangelii Gaudium*:** Apostolic exhortation

## 2014

**May 24-26 – Trip to Jordan, Israel, and Palestine:** Aimed at promoting peace and interfaith dialogue.

**June 8:** Pope Francis, Israeli President Shimon Peres, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and others come together in the Vatican Gardens for an unprecedented gathering to pray for peace in the Holy Land.

**August 14-18 – Trip to South Korea:** Pope Francis arrived in Seoul for the Sixth Asian Youth Day. After meeting with the Korean President, the pope made a speech in English in which he said, "I came here thinking of peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula." He also beatified the first-



Pope Francis gestures as he greets the crowd during his general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican February 22, 2017. Photo: CNS photo/Paul Haring

generation of 1254 Korean martyrs in Gwanghwa-mun Square to a crowd of about 800,000 people.

**September 21 – Trip to Albania:** This 11-hour visit was the first European trip made by Pope Francis. He highlighted Albania as a model for harmony between various religions by establishing a government which includes Muslims, Orthodox, and Catholics.

**October 5-19 – Synod on the Family:** This Extraordinary Synod focused on the pastoral challenges families face in a rapidly changing world, especially regarding divorce, remarriage, and non-traditional family structures. It aimed to open dialogue rather than propose doctrinal changes, seeking a deeper understanding of these issues within the Church.

**November 25– France:** A 4-hour visit to Strasbourg where Pope Francis addressed the European Parliament and the Council of Europe raising concerns about issues related to the migrant crisis and better conditions for workers.

**November 28-30– Turkey:** Pope Francis was invited to Turkey at the request of President Erdogan and a separate request from Patriarch Bartholomew I, patriarch of Constantinople. In his meetings, the pope highlighted his intentions to increase interfaith dialogues.

## 2015

**January 13-19 Sri Lanka and**

**the Philippines:** Pope Francis visited Sri Lanka from 13 – 15 visiting a shrine and the Basilica. The trip to the Philippines 15- 19 included a Mass in Manila attended by 6–7 million people, the largest papal gatherings in history surpassing the previous largest papal gathering 20 years earlier in the same venue.

**April 11 – *Misericordiae Vultus*:** Papal bull. Proclaims the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015–2016)

**June 6 – Bosnia and Herzegovina:** visited Sarajevo and celebrated Mass with 67,000 people in Kosovo Stadium.

**June 18 – *Laudato si'*:** Encyclical. Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, urging care for creation as a moral duty. It critiques consumerism, economic injustice, and environmental destruction, calling for an "integral ecology" that links social, ethical, and environmental issues.

**July 5–13 – Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay:** In July 2015, Pope Francis visited Ecuador, Bolivia, and Paraguay, meeting with leaders, clergy, and indigenous organisations. In Ecuador, he met President Rafael Correa and celebrated a Mass attended by 1.5 million people. In Bolivia, he was welcomed by President Evo Morales and controversially received a crucifix shaped like a hammer and sickle.

**September 19-27 – Trip to Cuba and the United States:** Pope Francis travelled to Cuba then

to Washington, DC, New York and Philadelphia during his first visit to the United States. He addressed Congress, the United Nations and the World Meeting and Families, canonised St Junipero Serra and visited the 9/11 memorial in New York.

**October 4-25 – Part two of the Synod on the Family:** The Ordinary Synod built on the 2014 discussions and emphasised the need for compassionate pastoral care for divorced and remarried individuals. While it upheld traditional teachings on marriage, it called for greater accompaniment and support for families in diverse situations.

**November 25-30 – Kenya, Uganda, and Central African Republic:** Pope Francis visited Kenya, Uganda, and the Central African Republic, becoming the first pope to enter an active war zone. He addressed interfaith leaders, spoke on climate change, honoured the Uganda Martyrs, and opened the Holy Door in Bangui, symbolising peace, and reconciliation.

**December 8 – Pope declares the Holy Year of Mercy:** Pope Francis opens the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica to inaugurate a Holy Year of Mercy. He invited churches around the world to designate a holy door as a reminder of his call for reconciliation.

## 2016

**February 12-17 – Pope stops briefly in Cuba before visiting Mexico:** Pope

Francis, on his way to Mexico, stopped in Cuba to meet Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow at the Havana airport and signed a joint declaration in the presence of Cuban President Raul Castro. In Mexico, he celebrated Mass in Ciudad Juarez, which borders El Paso, Texas. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the Mass, which included faithful on both sides of the border.

**March 19 – *Amoris Laetitia*:** Apostolic Exhortation

**April 16 – Greece:** Pope Francis visited the Greek island of Lesbos in support of the thousands of refugees who are there awaiting asylum, or who have passed through the island on their way to Europe and beyond.

**June 24-26 – Armenia:** Pope Francis went to Armenia to express friendship and support for the Armenian people and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

**July 27-31 – World Youth Day in Poland:** Pope Francis visited Kraków, Poland, the city where Pope John Paul II had served as the archbishop, to celebrate World Youth Day 2016. The Pope took the opportunity to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp where he spent time in silent prayer and visited the cell of Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Afterwards, he met with several Holocaust survivors before leaving the camp.

**September 30 – October 2 – Georgia and Azerbaijan:** In Georgia, the Pope was met with a cool reception as the heads of

the Georgian Orthodox Church encouraged their followers not to attend his mass in Tbilisi. In Azerbaijan, the Pope spoke of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance.

**October 31- November 1**

**– Sweden:** Pope Francis travelled to Sweden for an ecumenical ceremony marking the 499th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation Day. It was during this visit the signed was Statement on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation with Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan in a special Catholic-Lutheran dialogue.

## 2017

**April 28-29 – Egypt:** Pope Francis met with the president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church Pope Tawadros II.

**May 12-13 – Portugal:** The Pope visited Portugal to mark the centenary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima.

**September 6- 10- Colombia:**

Pope Francis met with President Juan Manuel Santos, celebrated Masses attended by tens of thousands, and encouraged Colombians to embrace forgiveness. In Cartagena, he denounced human trafficking as modern slavery and urged an end to Venezuela's political violence.

**November 27- December 2 – Myanmar and Bangladesh:**

The Pope sought to recognise each nation's struggle for independence, underline interreligious respect and encourage the local minority Catholic communities.

## 2018

**January 15- 21 – Chile and Peru:**

In Chile, Pope Francis faced protests over clerical abuse scandals. He also met indigenous Mapuche people, urging peace and justice, and called for prison reform. In Peru, he denounced corruption, addressed environmental concerns in the Amazon, and met indigenous groups.

**March 19 – *Gaudete et exsultate*:** Apostolic Exhortation

**April 21:** Pope Francis appointed three women as consultors to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the first-time women and laypeople were named as active contributors – not support staff. They joined a growing number of women the Pope has



named to top-level positions at the Vatican.

**June 21 – Switzerland:** The Pope visited the World Council of Churches in Geneva

**August 2:** Pope Francis ordered the revision of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to describe the death penalty as morally inadmissible and to affirm that the Church “works with determination for its abolition worldwide”.

**August 25-26 – Ireland for the World Meeting of Families:**

The first papal visit to Ireland since 1979. He met with Irish leaders, including Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, and acknowledged the Church's failures in handling clerical abuse. He visited the Knock Shrine and led Mass at Phoenix Park, where he asked for forgiveness for past Church abuses. While many welcomed him, protests highlighted continued anger over the Church's role in abuse scandals.

**September 22-25 – The pope visits the Baltic states:** Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia

**October 3-28 – Synod on Young People:** Focused on the challenges young people face in faith, vocation, and life. It emphasised listening to them, involving them in the Church, and helping them discern their paths.

## 2019

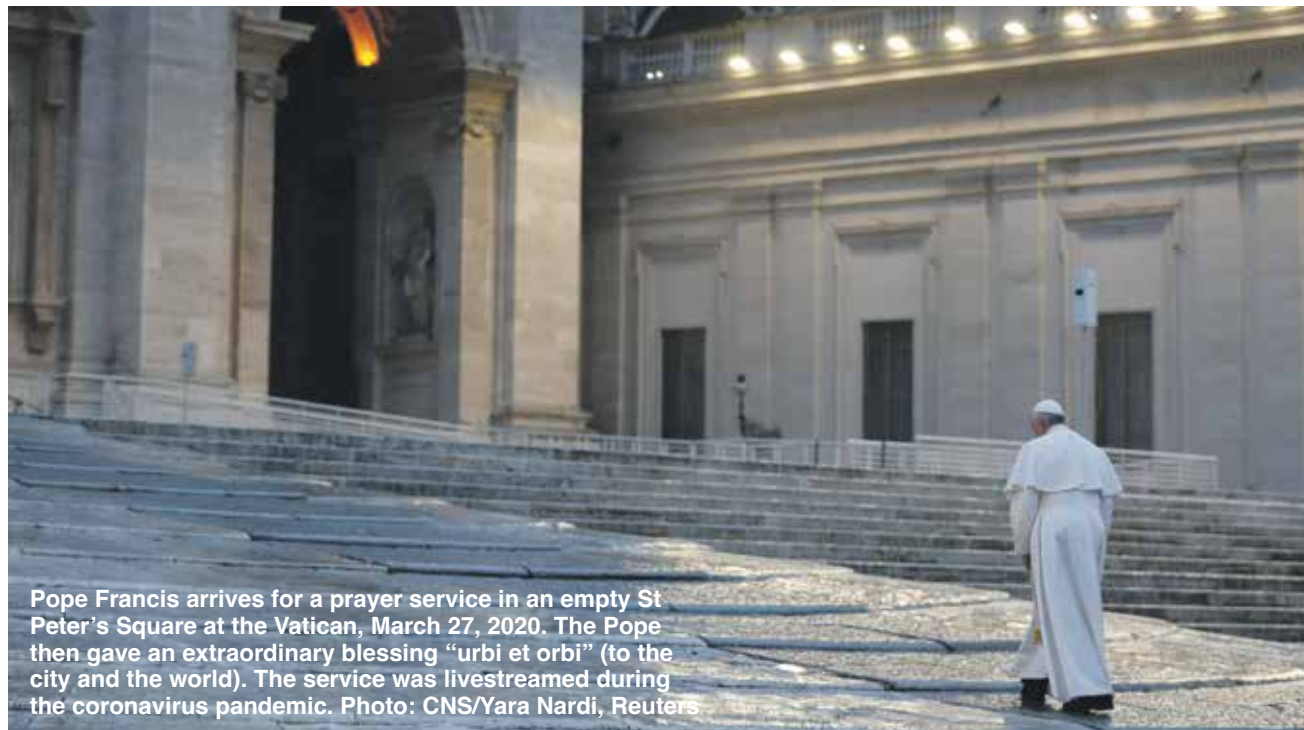
**January 23-27 – World Youth Day 2019 in Panama:** The first World Youth Day celebrated in Central America.

**February 3-5 – United Arab Emirates:** International Interfaith Meeting on “Human Fraternity” in Abu Dhabi. On February 4, Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar Mosque and university, sign the document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together during an inter-religious meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

**February 21-24:** Pope Francis convenes a global summit on child protection and abuse, bringing together 200 Church leaders – presidents of bishops' conferences, the heads of the Eastern Catholic Churches, superiors of men's and women's religious orders, survivors and Roman Curia officials. The summit at the Vatican included a penitential liturgy.

**March 25 – Christus vivit:** Apostolic Exhortation

**March 30-31 – Morocco:**



Pope Francis arrives for a prayer service in an empty St Peter's Square at the Vatican, March 27, 2020. The Pope then gave an extraordinary blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city and the world). The service was livestreamed during the coronavirus pandemic. Photo: CNS/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Visited with King Mohammed VI. The Pope delivered a speech praising Morocco's efforts to promote an Islam that repudiates extremism and said it was “essential” for all believers to counter religious fanaticism and extremism with solidarity.

**May 5-6 – Bulgaria and North Macedonia:** During this visit Pope Francis honoured Mother Teresa in her birthplace, Skopje, met with the poor, and encouraged young people to pursue hope and dialogue. His visit focused on interfaith relations, peace, and supporting marginalised communities.

**May 31- June 2 - Romania:** In Romania, promoting unity between Catholics and Orthodox Christians. The Pope met with Orthodox Patriarch Daniel, encouraged reconciliation, and honoured Romanian martyrs persecuted under communism. He also visited the Roma community, asking for forgiveness for past discrimination by the Church.

**September 4-10 – Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius:** In Mozambique, Pope Francis promoted peace and reconciliation following years of conflict. In Madagascar, he emphasised environmental protection and poverty alleviation, visiting a community working on sustainable development. In Mauritius, he praised the country's diversity and called for economic justice.

**October 6-27 – Amazon Synod:** Addressed pastoral care, environmental concerns, and support for indigenous communities, focusing on new forms of ministry in the Amazon region

**November 19-26 – Thailand and Japan:** Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

In Japan, Pope Francis expressed opposition to both nuclear weapons and nuclear energy.

## 2020

**February 2 – Querida Amazonia:** Apostolic Exhortation

**March 27:** During the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis prays and delivers his extraordinary blessing urbi et orbi (to the city and the world) during an evening prayer service from St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. St Peter's Square was empty, and the service was livestreamed.

**October 3 – Fratelli tutti:** Encyclical on fraternity and social friendship. It calls for solidarity, rejects division and individualism, and promotes dialogue, peace, and care for the marginalised. Inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, it urges a culture of encounter and universal love.

## 2021

**March 5-8 – Iraq:** Pope Francis visits Iraq amidst sporadic violence continuing in the country and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. He honoured those who remained faithful and worked to rebuild the country.

**July 4:** The Pope undergoes a three-hour scheduled surgery at a Rome hospital to remove part of his colon. Officials said it was required to treat diverticulitis, when bulging pouches in the lining of the intestine or colon become inflamed or infected. Throughout his pontificate he has suffered bouts of painful sciatica, and knee problems led him to start using a wheelchair in 2022.

**September 12-15 – Hungary and Slovakia:** Held the closing mass at the 52nd

Eucharistic Congress in Budapest.

**December 2-6 – Cyprus and Greece:** The four-day trip to the two Mediterranean countries included stops in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, Athens, the Greek capital, and the Greek island of Lesbos.

## 2022

**March 19 – Praedicate evangelium:** apostolic convention

**March 25 –** At the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Pope Francis consecrated Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

**April 2-3 – Malta:**

**July 24-30 – Canada:** The Pope took a ‘penitential trip’ to Canada to meet with, listen to and apologise to members of Canada's First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, especially those who experienced abuse or attempts at forced assimilation at Church-run residential schools.

**September 13-15 – Kazakhstan:** 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of Leaders of the World and Traditional Religions

**November 3-6 – Bahrain:** Pope Francis attended the Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence and met with Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

## 2023

**January 5:** Pope Francis presides over the funeral Mass for Pope Benedict XVI in St Peter's Square. It was the first time in more than 200 years that a pope celebrated the funeral of his predecessor.

**January 6 – In Ecclesiarum Communionem:** Apostolic Convention

**January 31 – February 5 – Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan:** In South

Sudan, the Pope travelled with the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to the Presidential Palace, where the pope issued a joint “pilgrimage of peace” address with his Anglican and Scottish Presbyterian counterparts.

**March 13:** Pope Francis celebrates his 10th anniversary as pope.

**April 28-30 – Hungary:** Second visit to Hungary. Met with some Ukrainian refugees and the Russian Orthodox Church leader Patriarch Kirill. Delivered a mass on the banks on the Danube with over 100,000 people in attendance.

**August 2-8 – Portugal for World Youth Day 2023:** Second visit to Portugal.

**August 31 -September 4 – Mongolia:** The first ever pope to visit Mongolia, a majority Buddhist country with only a few thousand Catholics.

**September 22-23 – France:** In Marseilles, Pope Francis also held an inter-religious prayer service at the city's memorial for sailors and migrants lost at sea. On 23 September, Pope Francis met with French President Emmanuel Macron and held a mass before tens of thousands of people at Marseille Stadium.

**October 4 – Laudate Deum:** Apostolic Exhortation

**October 15 – C'est la confiance:** Apostolic Exhortation

**December 18 - Fiducia supplicans:** On the pastoral meaning of blessings. A controversial Vatican declaration that allows priests to bless same-sex couples and others in irregular relationships, while reaffirming traditional Catholic teachings on marriage.

## 2024

**June 14:** The Pope participated in the 50th G7 summit in which he joined a session devoted to AI and held talks with the world leaders present. The was the first time a pope participated in a G7 summit.

**September 2-13 – Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore:** Throughout the trip to the Indonesian archipelago, Pope Francis preached peace. Queen Kanjeng described his visit as an “experience left me with a profound sense of joy and gratitude. It is a sacred blessing that I have received at this point in my life.”

**September 26-29 – Luxembourg and Belgium:** In the Low Countries, Pope Francis called for the church to evolve, evangelise, and to dialogue with the rest of the world.

**October 24 – Dilexit Nos:** Encyclical. Pope Francis criticises modern phenomena, such as individualism, social and economic disparities, and “uses of technology that threaten our humanity”, and calls for rediscovery of “heart” as a way towards unity, peace, and reconciliation in the modern era.

**December 15 – France:** Pope Francis was the first pope to visit Corsica.

## 2025

**January 14:** Pope Francis publishes *Hope: The Autobiography*. *Hope* is the first autobiography ever published by a Pope. It traces Pope Francis's journey from his Italian roots and his ancestors' migration to Latin America through his childhood, vocation, and papacy up to the present day.

**February 14:** Pope Francis was admitted to hospital due to bronchitis which eventually progressed to bilateral pneumonia.

**March 23:** The Pope arrived home after five weeks in hospital. However his time in the hospital was not spent idly as the Pope made 44 appointments, many declarations, and began preparations for the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly.

**April 21:** At 7:35am, Pope Francis passed away at the age of 88. A shepherd until the end, Pope Francis leaves a legacy of mercy, dialogue, and care for the poor and the planet. Though his final years were marked by health issues, he showed an unwavering strength in spirit, reminding people to build bridges until the end.



# Out&About

## Carrying the Cross in Colehill



**DONEGAL:** On Palm Sunday, the Parish of Newtowncunningham & Killea, Colehill had a live Way of the Cross held in the graveyard and grounds of the Parish Church for a “powerful” start to the Holy Week.



**WEXFORD:** The Annual Polish-Irish Way of the Cross took place on April 15 on Tara hill. The procession started at the car park across to the Tara Hill Honey.



**KILDARE:** Monasterevin Parish has new altar servers assisting during Mass.

### IN SHORT

#### Tributes paid to Limerick priest following his death

Tributes were paid to Fr Leo McDonnell of Limerick Diocese, who died on April 12 under the care of Milford Care Centre.

The Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy said, Fr McDonnell “certainly showed that in his acceptance of death, once he was told he had only a short time to live. Fr Leo exhibited what Teresa of Lisieux calls confidence in God’s love, with a child-like faith and trust that remains an example for us.”

St Michael’s Infant School said “Fr Leo was a frequent visitor to our school and was always so caring and considerate. May he rest in peace.”

On a Facebook post, Maranatha Prayer Ministry Limerick said, “we had the honour of journeying with Fr Leo with maranatha and he celebrated many Masses here [in St Michael’s Church] with us and came each month to the Greenhills hotel with our team for food after the afternoon retreats.”

The Polish community paid tribute to the priest with music and hymns.

Fr McDonnell’s reposing took place in St John’s Cathedral on April 14 and Requiem Mass on April 15 followed by burial in Mount St Lawrence Cemetery.

#### Donkey blessed in Co. Tipperary on Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday in St Cronan’s Church, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary had the presence of Bridie, the donkey, who followed the congregation procession and stopped before the altar for the Blessing of the Palm.

The donkey presence was portraying the one who carried Our Lady to Bethlehem. Bridie was led to the church by her owners, Michael Tierney and his son.

During the Blessing of the Palm, Fr Antun Pasalic CC Roscrea Parish said, “the donkey carried Jesus our Lord and God into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. God’s creatures give us signs of

hope. We pray this Holy Week for all in our Pastoral area of St Cronan.”

#### Thousands join for Sr Clare retreat

Recently, the Derry community gathered for their annual Sr Clare retreat in Long Tower. The event, which took place from March 31 to April 6 was the first after Sr Clare started her path to sainthood.

Fr Gerard Mongan, Admin. Long Tower said, “The fact that Sr Clare was declared ‘Servant of God’ in January has increased much more interest in her life’s story. Indeed, the numbers attending this year’s retreat proves that St Clare’s appeal is extending far beyond Derry.”

The priest said the 5th retreat had “the Long Tower church was filled with a huge crowd every evening from all parts with thousands joining online from all over the world.” The event had multiple talks, daily Mass, healing, anointing of the sick and friendship.



Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**LEITRIM:** Parishioners from Kiltoghert, Kiltubrid and surrounding parishes, who completed an 8-week Bible Study Course on Holy Tuesday. The course was initiated and led by the laity and was supported by Fr Ciarán Mc Guinness, CC Kiltubrid and Fr Frank Garvey PP Kiltoghert.



**MONAGHAN:** Canon Shane McCaughey and Canon Paddy McGinn in St Patrick's Church, Bawn, when Canon McCaughey recently celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation to 18 children from the parish.



**CAVAN:** Katie McHugh with her daughter Marie, son in law Michael Cunnane and grandsons, Michael and Daniel Cunnane on the occasion of her 100th birthday which was marked by Sunday Mass and presentation at The Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt.



**GALWAY:** Jack, a pupil from Calasanz College, Oranmore drew water from the local well, Tobar a Chailigh Mhéara, to be blessed at the Easter Vigil liturgy on Holy Saturday evening.



**DUBLIN:** Bro. Seán Kelly, Provincial Minister of the Capuchin Franciscans Province of Ireland celebrated his birthday on April 14 while on visit to the Capuchin Friary in Raheny.





**CORK:** Pupils at Gael Scoil Uí Riordain, Ballincollig celebrate as they present €2,375, the proceeds of a number of fundraising events, to Trócaire's Janet Twomey. Picture: Mike English.



**CORK:** Aghada Parish Confirmation retreat was recently held in Aghada Community Centre organised by Fr Danny Murphy, Bernadette O'Connor Mallow Youth Ministry, CDYS & her team. It was the first time the parish to had a Confirmation retreat for the three local primary schools – Scartleigh NS, Whitegate NS and Scoil Iosagain Atha Fhada.



**CORK:** Fr Michael Fitzgerald PP Blarney and Fr John McCarthy SP Ballyvourney, Vocations Director, were at Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Blarney to promote vocations to the priesthood.



**CAVAN:** Sarah Cunningham with Ciaran Coll of the Irish Church Music Association who recently delivered a Choral Workshop in Kingscourt at the invitation of the Parish Pastoral Assembly, culminating in a sung Mass at The Church of the Immaculate Conception.



**DONEGAL:** The Community of Greencastle came together for an Easter craft fair at Greencastle Community Centre on April 12. Pictured are Tilly McAleer and Dara Devlin.



Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



If you have any stories, photos, or events you wish to be considered for publication, email a week in advance of publication



**KILKENNY:** Fr Dan Carroll greeted American visitors from High Schools in Ohio and New York after Palm Sunday Mass in St John's Church.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictured is Alessha Vellikara as an angel.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictured is Ella Tully as an angel.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictured is Ryan Lavery as a disciple.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictures are Leo Buckingham, Tariq Ibrahim and Jack O'Connor as disciples.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictured is Mason Walls as Jesus.



**ANTRIM:** At the invitation of Fr Ciaran Feeney, pupils of St John the Baptist Primary School presented a Passion play at Holy Week Mass in the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Finaghy, Belfast. Pictured are Mason Walls as Jesus and Cahir Hanley as a Roman soldier.

## CAVAN

Virginia Credit Union are holding a coffee morning on April 26 from 9.30am to 1pm in aid of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland, Breffni Blues Special Olympics, Cystic Fibrosis Ireland and HUGG, Suicide Bereavement Support. Cake sale and raffle prizes on the day. All welcome.

## CLARE

'Burren Outdoor Retreat' takes place from May 17-19. Come for this guided journey through the Burren and let its landscape renew you in body and soul. For more information contact Mary on 087 970 1130 or book with Des on 065 689 7645.

## CORK

The annual Divine Mercy Novena will be held in St Patrick's Cathedral, Skibbereen on April 27. Confessions commence at 2.30pm and Novena prayers commence at 3pm. All welcome.

## DERRY

'Chat and a cuppa for seniors' takes place on Tuesdays from 10.30am to 12noon in Fairhill Youth Centre. For more info contact Noeleen on 075 9066 5460 or Kate on 077 1283 6511.

## DONEGAL

'Sing for a Joy! – A Day of Music and Ministry' takes place on April 26 at Lough Derg. A day of music, praise, faith, friendship and more. Boat departs at 9.30am. The event for 18-35-year-olds is free to attend. Registration is essential at [bit.ly/SingForJoy](https://bit.ly/SingForJoy).

## DUBLIN

The feast of divine mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 27 in St Vincent de Paul Church in Marino with holy hour at 3pm during which time confessions will be heard, followed by holy mass at 4pm.

## FERMANAGH

'Follow Me: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John', a video presentation to experience and learn about a closer relationship with Jesus. It takes place on May 7 at 7pm in St Michael's Parish Centre, Enniskillen. For more info email [bible@outlook.com](mailto:bible@outlook.com).

## KERRY

The Divine Mercy Sunday Ceremony takes place on

April 28 at 2.40pm in St John's Church, Tralee. All welcome.

## KILKENNY

Capuchin Friary is organising a Divine Mercy Sunday celebration on April 27 at 2.30pm. Come for rosary, confession, adoration, Eucharistic procession and more.

## MAYO

'Raising hope for our common home' celebrating Laudato Si' 10th anniversary takes place on April 26 from 10am to 4pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, Knock Shrine. Guest speakers are Éanna Ní Lamhna, Jane Mellett and Dr Brendan O'Keeffe. Ticket is €15, book on [faithrenewal@knockshrine.ie](mailto:faithrenewal@knockshrine.ie).

## MONAGHAN

Crocus Cancer Support Centre invites people who have lost loved ones to join the monthly support group. To book a place contact the office on 047 62565.

## SLIGO

'Afternoon with Priests & Religious' hosted by the Sisters of Life takes place on May 9 from 2pm to 4pm at the Clayton Hotel Sligo, Clarion Road. There will be two talks, Q&A and an opportunity to connect over tea/coffee. To register access [sistersoflife.org/event/visit-ireland/](https://sistersoflife.org/event/visit-ireland/)

## TIPPERARY

The Relics of Padre Pio will visit Holycross Abbey, Thurles on May 24-25. The welcome Mass is at 10am on May 24 and the evening prayer farewell is at 7pm on May 25 with the church closing at 8pm. For the whole schedule contact 0504 43124.

## TYRONE

Divine Mercy Sunday will be held in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher on April 27 at 2.30pm. All welcome for rosary, chaplet, homily, healing and benediction. Refreshments served after in the Parish Hall. Donations received will be given to Mary Meals.

## WEXFORD

The next family Mass in the Parish of Bunclody/Kilmyshall takes place on April 27 at 12 noon. All are welcome.





# World Report



Edited by Pedro Esteva  
pedro@irishcatholic.ie

## The world reacts to the death of Pope Francis

World leaders from around the globe released statements of mourning and remembrance on Monday in response to the death of Pope Francis, who passed away Monday morning at age 88.

### European Union leader: Pope's legacy will bring about 'more compassionate world'

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the late pontiff "inspired millions, far beyond the Catholic Church, with his humility and love so pure for the less fortunate."

Expressing condolences to "all who feel this profound loss," von der Leyen wrote: "May they find solace in the idea that Pope Francis' legacy will continue to guide us all toward a more just, peaceful, and compassionate world."

Francis and von der Leyen met several times over the course of his pontificate.

### Dalai Lama: Francis 'dedicated himself to the service of others'

The Dalai Lama mourned the passing of Pope Francis, urging the world to take up the late pontiff's example of service and generosity.

The pope "dedicated himself to the service of others, consistently revealing by his own actions how to live a simple, but meaningful, life," the Dalai Lama said.

"The best tribute we can pay to him is to be a warm-hearted person, serving others wherever and in whatever way we can."

### Ukrainian president grieves Pope Francis, source of 'spiritual support'

"Millions of people around the world are mourning the tragic news of Pope Francis' passing," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote in a post on X on Monday morning.

"[Francis] knew how to give hope, ease suffering through prayer, and foster unity," Zelenskyy reflected. "He prayed for peace in Ukraine and for Ukrainians. We grieve together with Catholics and all Christians who looked to Pope Francis for spiritual support. Eternal memory!"

### Indian Prime Minister Modi: Pope Francis was 'beacon of compassion'

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that Pope Francis will "always be remembered as a beacon of compassion, humility, and spiritual courage."

"From a young age, he devoted himself towards realizing the ideals of Lord Christ. He diligently served the poor and downtrodden. For those who were suffering, he ignited a spirit of hope," Modi wrote.

The pope's "affection for the people of India will always be cherished," he said.

### President Donald Trump: 'Rest in Peace Pope Francis'

US President Donald Trump on Monday asked God to "bless [Pope Francis] and all who loved him" after the Holy Father passed away on Monday morning.

"Rest in Peace Pope Francis!" Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Vice President JD Vance had earlier issued a statement mourning the pontiff's passing. "My heart goes out to the millions of Christians all over the world who loved him," the vice president said on a post on X.

### Macron: Pope 'wanted the Church to bring joy and hope'

French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday said he and his wife, Brigitte, "send our thoughts to all Catholics and to the grieving world" after the news of Pope Francis' death.

"From Buenos Aires to Rome, Pope Francis wanted the Church to bring joy and hope to the poorest," the president said. "May it unite people with each other and with nature. May this hope continually revive beyond him."

## Irish Cardinal Kevin Farrell plays key role following Pope Francis' death

Irish-born Cardinal Kevin Farrell has taken centre stage in the Catholic Church following the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday. As Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, Cardinal Farrell holds a critical role overseeing Church operations during the *sede vacante* – the period of papal vacancy.

Cardinal Farrell, 77, confirmed the Pope's death from the Domus Sanctae Mathae, the papal residence, after weeks of declining health. "With deep sorrow, I must announce the death of our Holy Father, Francis," he said. "His life was dedicated to the Gospel, with fidelity, courage, and love—especially for the poor and marginalised."

Born in Dublin in 1947, Kevin Farrell grew up in Drimnagh. He studied at the University of Salamanca and the Pontifical Georgian University before being ordained a priest for the Legionaries of Christ. He was later incardinated into the Archdiocese of Washington DC, where he served as vicar general.

In 2007, Pope Benedict appointed him Bishop of Dallas where he led one of the fastest-growing dioceses in the United States until 2016. That year, Pope Francis called him to Rome to head the newly established Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, and elevated him to the College of Cardinals. In 2019, Farrell was appointed camerlengo, a historic office that dates back centuries. In



Cardinal Kevin Farrell, 'camerlengo' or chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church, stands before the doors of the papal apartments at the Vatican before they are sealed April 21, 2025. Photo: CNS /Vatican Media.

June 2023, Pope Francis also appointed Farrell as President of the Vatican State's Supreme Court, further cementing his influence on Church governance.

But what does this role entail? The camerlengo plays a crucial administrative and symbolic role following a pope's death. He is responsible for officially verifying the pope's death, sealing the papal apartments, overseeing the Vatican assets, and preparing for the conclave. While sometimes seen as an

interim leader or a regent, the camerlengo does not govern spiritually or doctrinally as these powers are suspended until a new pope is elected.

Cardinal Farrell's announcement ushers in the period of *sede vacante* and set in motion preparations for the conclave, to be held in the Sistine Chapel. Only cardinals under the age of 80 are eligible to vote, and a two-thirds majority is required to elect the next pope. Historically, two camerlengos – Leo

XIII and Pius XII – were later elected to the papacy themselves.

Cardinal Farrell's central role in this transitional moment marks a historic moment for the Irish Church and underlines his global standing in the Catholic hierarchy. As the Church begins preparations to elect a new pontiff, Cardinal Farrell will continue to oversee its temporal affairs and help guide the Church through this time of mourning and renewal.

## Vatican postpones Carlo Acutis canonisation following Pope Francis' death

The Vatican announced Monday that the canonisation of Blessed Carlo Acutis, scheduled for April 27, has been postponed following the death of Pope Francis.

The Holy See Press Office confirmed the suspension of the canonisation, which was to coincide with the Vatican's Jubilee of Adolescents and expected to draw over 80,000 teenagers to Rome

from around the world.

Pilgrims, including students from St Joachim Parish in Sydney, had already begun arriving in anticipation of the event. Despite the postponement, a Mass for the Jubilee of Teenagers is still expected to proceed, according to *the Associated Press*.

Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 at age 15, is remembered for his deep

devotion to the Eucharist and his efforts to evangelise through modern technology. Born in London and raised in Milan, he was beatified in 2020 and is known as the first millennial on the path to sainthood.

The Vatican has not announced a new date for the canonisation. Pope Francis' funeral is expected in the coming days, with the papal conclave to elect his successor likely to begin within two weeks.

## Britain's highest court rules in favour of biological women

The UK Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the terms "woman" and "sex" in the 2010 Equality Act refer strictly to biological sex, not legal gender identity, marking a major legal clarification. The decision overrides Scottish guidance that included transgender

individuals with gender recognition certificates (GRCs) as women under the Act.

Deputy President Lord Hodge stated the ruling does not diminish legal protections for transgender individuals, who remain protected under the characteristic of "gender

reassignment."

The case stemmed from a legal challenge by women's rights group For Women Scotland against the Scottish Gender Representation on Public Boards Act (2018), which included transgender-identifying individuals in female quotas.

The court ruled that including GRC holders under the definition of women would be "incoherent and impracticable."

Author J.K. Rowling and For Women Scotland hailed the ruling as a significant win for women's rights and sex-based protections across the UK.



# Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,  
Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,  
Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

## Letter of the week

# Pope Francis pushed protection of human dignity

**Dear Editor,** As the worldwide Catholic family mourns the death of its spiritual leader, Pope Francis, it is important to examine his legacy on current issues. He is rightly remembered for his 2015 landmark encyclical "Laudato Si" which focused on care for the environment, justice for the mar-

ginalised and activism to save the planet. Included in his criticism of our modern "throwaway" society was his firm opposition to the practice of abortion.

"Since everything is interrelated," he wrote in the encyclical, "concern for the protection of nature is...incompatible with

the justification of abortion." He believed it is hypocritical to talk about concern for "other vulnerable beings...if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties".

As recently as May 2024, Pope Francis openly contended that

governments and civil society have a fundamental duty to protect and promote the dignity of every human being, "offering women, the bearers of life, the necessary conditions to be able to accept the gift of life and ensure a dignified existence for their children."

As we mourn his passing and

recall this Pontiff's great compassion, humility and concern for the earth and its people, it is appropriate to reflect on his unwavering respect for the dignity of every human life, born or unborn.

*Yours etc.,  
Sinéad Boland,*

*Kilmacanogue, Co Wicklow*

## We must defend our religious orders

**Dear Editor,** The Social Democrats' attitude towards religious orders in Ireland is nothing new, but we are reminded in David Quinn's article [*The Irish Catholic* – April 10, 2025]. The demonisation of the Sisters of Charity over the National Maternity Hospital, and the dangerous rhetoric about seizing religious assets, is alarming. To suggest Garda raids on the homes and hospitals of elderly nuns – many of whom have dedicated their lives to serving the sick, poor, and vulnerable – is grotesque and chilling.

It is also historically illiterate. Only the most authoritarian regimes have moved to seize religious assets – Henry VIII, revolutionary France, communist dictatorships. Are these really the models we want to imitate?

Religious orders have quietly and faithfully carried out Christ's work for generations. We should raise our voices to defend them.

*Yours etc.,  
Patrick McGrath  
Ashbourne, Co. Meath*



## Nine parishioners representing 150,000?

**Dear Editor,** Your recent news story 'LGBTQ+ people to gather in Limerick in response to Synod' [*The Irish Catholic* – April 10, 2025] brought to mind the Synod meeting I attended last week in our neighbouring diocese.

Billed as the only in-person lay gathering for the whole of our scattered diocese it attracted a grand total of nine lay parishioners. We were asked to help the diocesan organisers determine which of the 17 topics were the most

important.

We had a nice evening getting to know one another and deciding that we should link 'Baptism' and 'Belonging' together as the topics we wanted to feature in feed back to the National Synodal Committee.

On our hour-long drive back home my wife and I

asked ourselves if the views of nine random parishioners really represented the minds of the 150,000 who failed to turn up.

Finally, I am not sure if any of our gathering would have qualified as 'LGBTQ+ people'.

*Yours etc.,  
Alan Whelan  
Beaufort, Co. Kerry*

## Believing we are all on the road to salvation

**Dear Editor,** Never a happy camper going to Confession, as we were taught to name it. I wish to acknowledge my sincere thanks when attending the Sacrament of Reconciliation, now more appropriately named at Our Lady and St John's Church in Carrigaline, Co. Cork, on Wednesday night last.

Having read the appropriate Gospel and sincerely praying for world peace, interspersed by uplifting hymns, we were reminded of our unequivocal forgiveness of our sins as secured by the life and death of our saviour, Jesus. Not overlooking that we are all penitents, we were encouraged to forget past sins, already forgiven, and concentrate on trying to live better lives, and believing that we are all on the road to salvation, where we will see the Triune God and enjoy everlasting happiness in our 'for ever' home.

*Yours etc.,  
Mary O'Mahony  
Crosshaven, Co. Cork*

## Ironical that Govt now seek to punish

**Dear Editor,** The mothers and babies who ended up in the Mother and Baby Homes were rejected by the father of the baby, by the families of the child's parents, when they knew, and by society in general, while the Government remained largely inactive.

Female religious orders came to the rescue of these mothers and their babies.

How ironical it is that the Government, who did very little for these mothers and their babies, is now seeking to punish and shame the current members of these same religious orders whose predecessors, for the most part, did their best to help them.

*Yours etc.,  
Mary Lally  
Clontarf, Dublin*

## Taking up the case for butterflies

**Dear Editor,** While they have a lot on their plate right now, I appeal to those in power to take up the cause of butterflies. I'm sure your readers have noticed that they aren't as common as they used to be.

Conservationists lament their absence, even in the flowery patches where they always thrived. All types of butterfly, including the Monarch, Orange Tip, the Large White, and Green-Veined, have decreased by more than half in recent years across our island, largely due to the effects of intensive agriculture.

Figures from the National Biodiversity Data Centre show that the Irish population of the eye-catching orange-tips declined by 65% between 2008 and 2023.

Habitat favourable to the butterfly has been degraded or decimated by the drive to make big profits from the land. When you add climate change and the continued irresponsible deployment of deadly chemicals you can see why this masterpiece of creation struggles to survive.

Apart from their prettiness, and their essential role in pest control and tackling pollution, there's another reason why I

don't want them to succumb to ecological wipe-out.

It has long been a symbol of metamorphosis: The lowly caterpillar "dies", only to become a vibrant and attractive being in what might be called its afterlife. Worldwide, people swear that butterflies appear on dates, or in specific locations, associated with the passing of loved ones.

If you haven't experienced a "visitation" yourself you've surely heard of someone whose heart gladdened at the sight of a butterfly unexpectedly turning up, and possibly in the most unexpected place, to seemingly reassure them that the departed was at peace elsewhere.

I believe that they're really special and worthy of protection from the multiple threats facing them.

Too many species have disappeared from this sad old world, some scarcely missed except by those who study nature and biodiversity.

So let's take a stand for these winged messengers of the spirit!

*Yours etc.,  
John Fitzgerald  
Callan, Co. Kilkenny*

## Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.



# Fr Joe Mullen – Being a priest after cancer and a pilgrim of hope



Garry O'Sullivan

**Garry:** I'm here this morning with Fr Joe Mullen, who is moderator and priest of Mount Merrion in Dublin. Have I got that correct, Joe?

**Fr Joe:** Okay, so I have a partnership of three parishes. So I'm parish priest and moderator of Clonskeagh, which is the Church of the Miraculous Medal on Bird Avenue, St Therese's Church in Mount Merrion and St Lawrence of Toole's Church in Kilmacud.

**Garry:** So you're a busy man.

**Fr Joe:** I have three huge parishes to administer, 14 schools between the three parishes. And yes, you could say it's a busy job.

**Garry:** We spoke recently about priesthood. And as you know, *The Irish Catholic* has been talking about relentless ministry and priesthood. And you mentioned three stages of priesthood. Maybe we could talk about that a little bit and talk about your first stage and what that involved.

**Fr Joe:** Sure. I made a joke that I'd heard the three stages of priesthood described as beginning with a big head, moving into the middle phase with a big belly and finishing at the end of a long and happy life with a big funeral. And there's truth in all three of those things. And I suppose as I begin to mark anniversaries or come towards a 40th anniversary of priesthood, you do think back to a lot, to origins and beginnings and how did it start and where did it start. And to be honest, those are very happy memories.

And I suppose that's partly why you think back to it. We're getting to an age and stage in life where some of our family members are retiring. And I suppose that gives a sort of trigger for looking back over 40 years of a life.

And for me, that began really well. I went to Clonliffe



College, which was a very, very wonderful place to give me the opportunity then to study in UCD. And then a bit surprisingly, because there hadn't been any great relationship between the Dublin Archdiocese and Maynooth, I was asked to go to Maynooth with two other people, Donal Roche and John Collins.

And we went down and re-established a relationship with the National Seminary. And again, three brilliant years in Maynooth, giving us classmates from all over the country and gave us a great education. It was a fantastic experience.

And then I was ordained, firstly as a deacon in Maynooth and then later a priest in my home parish of St. Joseph in Ballymartin Co. Down in 1986. So that's where the timeline begins. Three years teaching in a vocational

school in Dublin was a brilliant start.

And then a few years postgrad study overseas and then back to the parish of Iona Road and on the staff at Clonliffe College. I sometimes say, carefully, to parishioners wherever I've been since, that those were the happiest days of my life. People don't like to hear that if they think you should be the happiest where you are now.

**Garry:** And when you look back on those times and your own vocation and being a young priest, does the inner historian come out or the inner sociologist? How do you see it, process it? Or does it all seem a blur how it went from that kind of high point to where we are today so quickly?

**Fr Joe:** Look, I guess when I hear people retiring, they often look back on their life

and they can see the strengths and weaknesses in the early years of anybody's development and job and profession and career. But one of the great things about being a young priest those years, 40 years ago, was that you were sheltered in the companionship and the strength of other priests and older priests.

**“You have that absolute feeling of knowing almost nothing. And they have just such wisdom and experience through all their years”**

I can remember very well being appointed to Sandyford Parish and the parish priest was 75 years of age, just about to retire. And the two curates were roughly 30 years ordained each. And I was three months ordained.

And you have that absolute feeling of knowing almost nothing. And they have just such wisdom and experience through all their years. And through those three years there in Sandyford, like a man called Des Hogan, and

he was just the most beautiful companion priest. He was so easily able to translate my learning into practical activity, showing you how to manage yourself, the sacristy, the altar servers, the rituals, Christmas and Easter. And to do that with joy.

But there we were four men in that parish, great mutual support. And there, I suppose, looking back on it, I wouldn't have known as a young man just how much they enjoyed sharing their experience of ministry with me.

And that's the thing that I miss the most now as I'm older, not having younger priests or people in training or formation just to share the energy and enthusiasm for ministry with. That's a real loss.

**Garry:** Back then, you had your busy seasons probably, and there was a regular flow of funerals, marriages, baptisms, and so on. But now, it's pretty relentless, isn't it? It's just a numbers game now?

**Fr Joe:** Well, I think when you talk to priests individually, as we're talking now, most of us would be a bit self-effacing when it comes to being busy or too busy. Life and ministry is a life of

responding to the pastoral needs that arise in the community with which you're working. So, for example, in my parish this week, there's a funeral on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

**“I would say that in these latter 10 years of my life, particularly in full-time parish ministry, I am much busier than I was in the first 10 or 15 years of my life”**

That is a bit relentless, that's busy trying to do a funeral one day, meet a family the next day, do a funeral the following day, and then move into Saturday afternoon baptisms and then move immediately from that into Sunday Masses. So that is a bit relentless, to use that expression. But most of us wouldn't present ourselves as being overwhelmed or not able to manage that workload. And sometimes people, when they come in for the occasions, what they're really struck by is the vitality and the energy, which gives them

**“One of the great things about being a young priest those years, 40 years ago, was that you were sheltered in the companionship and the strength of other priests and older priests”**



the perception that you must be very busy to make all this happen. And it is true up to a point. But I would say that in these latter 10 years of my life, particularly in full-time parish ministry, I am much busier than I was in the first 10 or 15 years of my life.

**Garry:** But aren't we in a place, though, where you have what people would call cultural Catholics and they're not coming to church. But then when they do come for a particular event, you find yourself in a situation where there's less and less priests.

But it comes down to resources, you can only spread yourself so thin?

**Fr Joe:** Well, perhaps one of the advantages of what infrastructure has been built up over the years is that, generally speaking, the churches have a capacity much greater than the people who come day by day or Sunday by Sunday. So even though there are fewer of us, if I were perhaps only to say one Mass across my parish or across the three parishes, then there is plenty of room for all the people who could come together to be present.

So we could gather in greater numbers if we rationalise. So that's one way of using the resources and the energy. But I just want to circle back a little bit on what you're saying, because you touch into something that people my age and older talk about a lot.

But in my own experience with my nephews and nieces of the younger generation, they don't talk about it at all. So what you said a moment ago suggested that we see people come only for baptisms or Christmas or particular events, a funeral or whatever, and they don't come at any other time. And we sort of look at that through the eyes of that's a pity or it's a great loss to us that people don't come.

I think we were constantly trying to get people back. And now in these later years of my priesthood, I think you're more inclined to try and meet people where they're at and sort of recognise that my relationship with Christ and my participation in Church and my ministry and leadership is given to the faith community and then people touch into that where it meets their need rather than every single Sunday at 10 o'clock because maybe the whole con-

struct of weekend has changed and maybe people's life and faith has changed and people's relationship with the church has changed. So not to hold expectations that will never be satisfied but also to have a real respect for the dignity of people when you do meet them.

**“I said, now lads would you ever think of coming inside? ‘Ah Jaysus’ said the young fella, ‘I wouldn’t go in there father,’ he says ‘it’s full of hypocrites’”**

It is a tension, don't get me wrong, it is definitely a tension. And you know, I used to teach preaching in Clonliffe College and one of the things I did on a Sunday was go out and hear the students in their different parishes and I've always remembered going up to Ballymun Road to Our Lady of Victories to hear a student one Sunday and I parked my car and I was walking, Mass had already begun, and I was walking towards the church and there were three young fellas sitting on the wall and I just stopped and said hello to them for a second and I said, now lads would you ever think of coming inside? “Ah Jaysus” said the young fella, “I wouldn't go in there father,” he says “it's full of hypocrites.” And I thought to myself, you know, there is a perception of the young fella, of who's in there, like because probably

when people come out these young fellas in hoodies and tracksuits are probably slightly looked at disdainfully by people who have just received the Eucharist and are walking away from Mass.

So who knows, but you can't presume the priority of that religious observant way as being the only way because it isn't what people are doing. So it would be a pure frustration if you sought to see that and nothing else.

**Garry:** You mentioned you were away on holidays in January, but also last year you had some illnesses. Do you want to talk a little bit about that and the challenges of health and the ministry?

**Fr Joe:** So I suppose, again, I imagine for everybody, ageing brings with it sometimes challenges and a bit of adversity, and obviously illness can come to people at any time in their life.

But for somebody such as myself, who'd never been a day in hospital in my life, I'd never had anything more than a cold. I still have my appendix and all those sort of things. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

And that just is a big change in life for any man. It's a particularly unpleasant journey to discover that you have that cancer, then to the various procedures that follow and the ultimate surgery and recovery from it. So for the first time in my life, I both was ill and dependent and then off work. So I'd say, yes, that was an extremely challenging year for me. And there's many blessings and benefits that come with that. You certainly had tremendous sense of how much people value you, which is lovely to know.

You get great encouragement and support from your family, which, again, you know it's there, but sisters giving up weeks of their lives

**“You can't spiritualise that and say, ‘oh, you've got it at your side’ or ‘the spirit is with you’. That's true for all of us, the men with wives and without. But just at the human level of comfort, strength, and support, I definitely felt that I was missing something that was a vital part of the engagement, the courage, and the recovery that this sort of surgery required”**

to come in rotas of one after the other to spend a week to do the minding and the looking after. It was very moving, really. And then just the wider circle of priest friends.

**“Blessings come through adversity and that's what I've always admired. But a bit like the story of the leper, I did find myself talking about ‘we who are sick’ rather than ‘they who are sick’ or ‘the sick’”**

The priest friends were absolutely brilliant for bringing lots of food to my house, the sort of things you could pop in the oven and heat up. But I was very conscious during that time as to how the different parts of my life engaged with the reality of illness and the reality of cancer, and particularly with prostate cancer, which is very impactful in your life. And just some people are able to talk about that.

Some people want to know how it is for you. And then most people really are very happy to see that you're getting better and you'll be back to work. So yeah, it was a very challenging year in my life.

Like I say, many graces and blessings come through adversity and that's what I've always admired. But a bit like the story of the leper, I did find myself talking about ‘we who are sick’ rather than ‘they who are sick’ or ‘the sick’. And every Monday in Mount Marion, we offer Mass for those who are sick or unwell.

And we have the prayer of Pope John XXIII about strength. And I've been praying that prayer year in, year out, Monday after Monday.

And suddenly then to pray it as the one who was seeking that strength for myself, I have to say quite a

change in perspective in life.

**Garry:** I remember you mentioned about that initial phase of sitting outside the consultant's office and there was other men there and the mix of feelings on different faces. But you mentioned that some of them were with their wives, the wives holding their hands, giving them comfort. And I think at the time you said that, there was a stark sense of ‘I'm on my own here’.

**Fr Joe:** That's absolutely true. Like if you've ever been to a urology department, which I hope you never have to go to, there are predominantly men who are there, obviously. And men around my own age, I'd be 65 on my next birthday.

So men between I'd say 60 and 75. And each and every time I went, I was really struck by the fact that a lot of the men looked a bit dazed whenever you go into these rooms for various parts of the examination and whatever, it's all uncomfortable. Like you haven't got your trousers on and you're bending over and it's really, really, really uncomfortable stuff.

And then they'd come out and they'd be waiting for information or for results. And for the greater part, most of those men looked a bit dazed and I hadn't a mirror to look at myself, but I'm sure I was equally dazed. But the majority of them had their wife with them, the majority.

The fact of celibacy is given and the fact that you live alone is absolutely my lived experience for my whole adult life, but not having that other person with the affirmation, the gentleness, the sense of being carried a little bit. Like I was very comfortable to say earlier in this conversation about the shelter that I felt as a young priest in the company of the older men. But when you come to be the older man and you face into illness and you're in that sort of situation, you couldn't not be aware of what you don't have.

And you can't spiritualise that and say, ‘oh, you've got it at your side’ or ‘the spirit is with you’. That's true for all of us, the men with wives and without. But just at the human level of comfort, strength, and support, I definitely felt that I was missing something that was a vital part of the engagement, the courage, and the recovery that this sort of surgery required.

So yeah, it was a bit of a

chastening thing. And the mates are great, but they don't really come to the urology department with you. And the sisters were fine, but they don't live locally.

So like I say, at the end of the day, on one occasion, the day that I was likely going to be told that I had cancer, I did bring a priest friend with me. But mostly I was there by myself.

**Garry:** And how has the recovery been going for you? You're looking well here.

**Fr Joe:** Yeah, prostate cancer is funny. They have a few choices whenever you have that cancer. I went for the one that was recommended.

The most positive thing, I was 63 whenever I was diagnosed, and the most positive thing that they say to you in the consulting rooms is, well, now you have a 30 year life expectancy. 93 is now sort of considered to be the expectancy of a man in Ireland. So you have 30 year life expectancy.

**“To be back at ministry probably for three to six months with nappies, I'd have to say... That was extremely difficult and challenging. And that improves over time”**

So you'd be very wise now to have the radical prostatectomy and get rid of everything and go on from there. So I went that route. So that's in itself fairly major surgery.

And then because something has been taken away, it's really the real issues there that are easy to talk about are bladder control. So it's a very hard thing to come back to ministry as I did, and you recover and heal from the surgery after six or eight weeks. But Ministry doesn't have much gradualism about it.

You either are the priest who's there to do or you're not. And if you're meeting a family to do their mom's funeral, they don't really look at you. Knowing where you were last week or next week, if they're not in your parish regularly.

So people just meet you expecting competence and performance and that you'll





be able to give them your full time and attention and do things well. So to be back at ministry probably for three to six months with nappies, I'd have to say... That was extremely difficult and challenging. That improves over time.

And I've improved very well, completely dry now, which is wonderful. But I'd have to say people have no idea. And I suppose that's what makes you a more compassionate person as time goes on.

But people have no idea, looking at somebody, what they're going through. And certainly many people will have looked at me, internally I'm in some distress or discomfort, but there's no particular way that that could be understood, appreciated or shared with the people you're ministering to. So yeah, challenging and demanding.

And then really I found in those first months after I came back, that if I did three hours in the morning of active ministry, then I needed to be in bed for three hours in the afternoon to be able to pick up the work that had been done in the evening. So that's a very hard thing then to just try and find a new balance of having less energy, needing more rest for recovery, and also meeting the challenges of being in three parishes simultaneously as parish priest.

**Garry:** And I'm guessing here now, but if I was to take a bet, I would say you probably came back before your doctor told you to, did you?

**Fr Joe:** Well, I'd say two things.

**“I was fascinated that my whole instinct, and to be honest, the instinct of the medics as well, was to try and have the surgery at the time that would be least inconvenient for the parish”**

Firstly, I scheduled the surgery for the beginning of January, because January and February are the quiet months. So I scheduled the surgery so that I could take January, February and March off. And then I came back into Holy Week.

So of course, if I were to advise anybody else, I would say rest up in January and February, have the surgery and recovery during the busiest time of the year, come back in early summer when it's quiet, and then you might be healthy and well for September. But I was fascinated that my whole instinct, and to be honest, the instinct of the medics as well, was to try and have the surgery at the time



that would be least inconvenient for the parish, and not really thinking about when you come back then, will that be the best way to go back to work? So yeah, I would say if I were a teacher, I may have stayed off a little longer, or if I had a different job or occupation, or many men of my age would retire with prostate cancer at this stage. So yeah, a bit of a challenge.

**Garry:** But then you had the knee operated on?

**Fr Joe:** Well, having knee replacement surgery then followed. So one January was prostate surgery, and the following January was a full knee replacement. And again, that's another six weeks off work. That's another period of being in hospital.

It doesn't have the connotation of cancer, and it's not deeply intrusive into the body in the way that the prostate was, but it's painful and awkward, and it takes ages to get up and mobile. And whenever you have a knee replaced, the doctors always talk about load bearing, but if you stand at the altar and go off to do a funeral, you're on your feet a lot. So I find the recovery really painful and difficult, and very, very slow.

But compared to what I'd gone through the year before, yeah, you're just sort of see the knee as a bit more mechanical, but the pain and discomfort is terrible, but the fear or the challenge to your life or to your existence, I think for myself, just a simple thing, but I had lost a priest friend to a very, very tough prostate can-

cer, and he had that in his 74th year. So he died just before he would have retired, and his last 18 months on earth were terrible. It's not a bad cancer to have and to get if it's got early and treated, but if it isn't, then of course, it's a terrible part of the body.

I suppose when I became diagnosed with cancer myself, then you don't know at the beginning whether you're going to get the mechanical sort of quick intervention and recovery as I have had myself, or whether it'll be more serious. So I'm blessed it was not serious in that sense, but trying to find the time to recuperate and get well from two surgeries while keeping the communions and confirmations, the funerals, the Masses, the administration. The thing that surprises me a little bit is that there hasn't been more overt response in the parishes.

**“The whole church is suffering from a lack of involvement or volunteering, certainly to be able to sustain the size and scope of our presence in the way that we've built it up over the years”**

I don't want to speak badly of my own place because. I don't mean it in that sense at all, but I did think that people

would see, as my three colleagues have now all moved in around the 80 mark, and I have been off work for these couple of times, you would think there'd be sort of a groundswell at local level of 'what can we do', or 'can we take some of this responsibility off you for the management administration, the finance, the parish councils'. The whole Church is suffering from a lack of involvement or volunteering, certainly to be able to sustain the size and scope of our presence in the way that we've built it up over the years. So I suppose in a self-pitying way, I might've thought people would sort of step in and take responsibility off me. Hasn't really happened.

Then in general, as I'm getting well and back out myself, I'm very conscious that in these post COVID years, there is a qualitative change, and that means also the level of volunteering and support. So this is a new dilemma that will people, say around the 50 years of age mark or younger, or people as they come up on retirement at 65, will they see the parish as a purposeful place of engagement to share

their gift and talent and experience, and really look after their local faith community? In the past, when we were many priests, we didn't give people the opportunity, and of course people can say, 'oh, now you need us, you're going to take us in.' Fair enough, I don't mind any critique that people have, but we have to live in the present moment. And in the present moment, we clearly don't have the level of engagement or the resources that we need to be healthy and well.

So it's a big challenge.

**Garry:** As I was listening to you there, I just thought, okay, you're 65. What if in the morning, you say you've done a lot, you have had an amazing career, you've done so much, but 'I'm 65, I've had prostate surgery, I've had a taste of my own mortality on the horizon. I have a dodgy knee, I've given a lot, and maybe like everyone else around me, my brothers and sisters, as they're hitting 65, I think I'd just like to retire'.

Maybe buy a little hacienda out in, somewhere in Southern Spain, have a little bolthole or a friend's house, or a sister has a holiday home, and just maybe ease

into retirement, get a bit of a garden going, you know, whatever it is. I don't know if you play golf or whatever, you probably don't have time. What would happen if you did that in the morning? Because you said your colleagues are in their 80s.

What would actually happen if you did that tomorrow?

**Fr Joe:** Well, the first thing that would happen is your salary would stop. All right, okay. So that's the first thing.

**“If you just decided to step aside, is you would have to have personal resources to do that. And most of us don't”**

You wouldn't have any financial support. There's no pension for a priest at 65.

And that's being very realistic. As priests, we're kept in that sense. So we live in a parish house, and we're paid by the contributions of the people through the diocesan funds.

So the very first thing, if you just decided to step aside,

**“I'm very conscious that in these post COVID years, there is a qualitative change in the level of involvement, and that means also the level of volunteering and support”**





**“There was a lot of change to do with child protection, a lot of procedures to do with vetting, a lot of good practice that emerged to try and remediate and hope that history wouldn’t repeat itself. But to actually engage with what happened—Evaluation, really, isn’t it? It just didn’t happen”**

is you would have to have personal resources to do that. And most of us don’t. Secondly, we don’t even frame the conversation like that for ourselves.

It’s very understandable, and I did set it up a little bit when my friends, all my school friends are retiring this year. Anytime we meet or go for lunch, everybody’s talking about, my wife doesn’t want me. I’m trying to stay on.

I’ve sold my business, but I want them to keep me. Everybody’s sort of struggling with that. Because 65 is still relatively young in our culture.

And for those who are already grandparents, they seem to have an immense task of 10 years of looking after small children. But for a priest, we set out on a journey that always had 50 years of service. And even, like I mentioned at the beginning, that my first parish priest was 74 when I went, and he retired then in that end of my first year.

So we’ve always had that sense that a priestly life and ministry is both present and of service to people. But in that initial time, the man between 65 and 75 didn’t work as hard. In other words, the younger priest, usually there was a senior curate who really fulfilled the role of parish priest and a couple of younger guys.

So that older man was very much a pleasant presence with wisdom and with a certain amount of knowledge and capacity. And he would obviously do things for people he knew, and he might have one Mass on a Sunday, but it was a much gentler life from 65 to 75. Like a country

sergeant or something in the garden.

**“Although it’s very relentless and there’s a lot demanded, at another level, there’s an awful lot of things that don’t happen anymore. Like people don’t invite us to their houses”**

Just that it was seniority, and it was no huge expectation. But because our life is to live and in and with and among the people, and because I mentioned a moment ago, that’s where our physical dwelling comes from and where our income comes from, then it’s important just to recognise that what has to be negotiated between 65 and 75 is what energy you can expend on the ministry that you do and what personal and pastoral and spiritual gift you can bring and how you manage that. I suppose we’re all a bit better able as we get older to sort of manage our time.

That’s the real challenge and our energy. At the same time, although it’s very relentless and there’s a lot demanded, at another level, there’s an awful lot of things that don’t happen anymore. Like people don’t invite us to their houses.

I haven’t blessed a house or a holy picture, I wouldn’t think, in 10 or 12 years. A young woman came in to have her wedding papers done the other evening, and she had a papal blessing. And I fell upon it to have a look.

I’m not sure that I’d ever seen a papal blessing with Pope Francis on it. So when you’re a young priest, everybody has a papal blessing, which is part of the ritual. And now suddenly she’s emulating something her mum did, and that was, she said their parents had it hanging in their bedroom from their own wedding, so she wanted one too.

So there’s a lot of things that we don’t do anymore. And then when you’re running three parishes, there’s a certain amount of administration that has to be done. And then when you’re trying to manage the Masses, you get to focus a lot on that.

**Garry:** But why can’t all that administration be managed by an administrative office in Archbishop’s House or wherever HQ is at the moment? Why are you guys doing it, you’re the secretary, you’re the administrator, you’re the priest, you’re the...

**Fr Joe:** No, well, hang on. Everything that is organised is going to require some form of structure, and everybody needs to have some sort of working relationship with somebody who’s in charge. So in the American model, almost every parish has a parish manager, and priests are absolutely, completely freed of that responsibility.

But in America, people have had the habit of contributing to their parish in a way that would give an income flow that would pay music ministry, pay the parish school of religion teachers, and would pay for the management of the parish itself. In the Irish model, we have very great generosity among our people, of course, but we’ve always had a little from a lot of people contrib-

uting, and that was enough to manage the system with many priests and nuns to do the work. As we’ve changed, very few younger people contribute to the church.

There’s no way that we have an instinct towards giving your financial support so that employment of catechists or administrators or music ministers would enhance the life of the church. There isn’t that sense of ownership of the parish and the church, and there is your dilemma, because we provide a lot of services, and if people don’t have that identity of this is our priest, our parish, our church, if it’s the priest, the parish, and the church, and if the church is spoken in a way that is disdainful in a culture that has sort of cancelled Catholicism, then there’s really none of that sort of positive spiritual energy, financial support. It was always about time and treasure and gift, people sharing what they had, and in reality, that just doesn’t happen anymore.

I honestly think that money will bring the size and scale of the operation of the church down to size relatively quickly.

**Garry:** If you were a newspaper, I’d be telling you, you need to go behind a paywall, and as an influencer, essentially, that’s what you are in your parish, you’d probably have to have a subscription service.

**Fr Joe:** Well, I have jokingly, when Michael O’Leary was going to charge for the toilet on the Ryanair flights, I was suggesting we put turnstiles at the entrance of the church, which people would either have to drop a coin into to get in or have their swipe card because they were paying members.

**“The physical and psychological abuse, institutions, parishes, priests, religious, laundries, all of this, it’s like a cloud that just covers the reason that the church is there in the first place”**

I mean, it’s very easy to laugh and joke and talk about what it could be and why it is the way it is, but we have, in our church culture, a very dark, malignant period of time where the whole reality of abuse and the abuse of children and wider than just sexual abuse, the physical and psychological abuse, institutions, parishes, priests, religious, laundries, all of this, it’s like a cloud that just covers the reason that the church is there in the first place, the cloud that just darkens the whole experience for people so they don’t see the life and the love and the joy, they don’t desire it as part of their identity, they

don’t want to be religious and observant in something that, in the society that they live in, has sort of become toxic. So there’s a lot of processing to be done there. Most young people, in my experience, don’t have any bad experience in the church themselves, but there’s a sort of a middle period where people are just repelled or disgusted or disappointed or angry.

There’s only been very few opportunities for people in any way to process that. Even after the Murphy Report and the Dublin Archdiocese, I’d been part of the committee that prepared for that report coming out. We must have met 30 or 40 times to prepare for the report.

We never met again when the report was issued. There was never any processing of what was said about our diocese and historically about priests and about the bishops who’d managed it. There was no gathering to reflect on the systemic nature of abuse.

There was no sense of us looking at each other as brother priests, wondering how it could be that we could sustain a healthier life with and for each other. There was no real questioning. There was a lot of change to do with child protection, a lot of procedures to do with vetting, a lot of good practice that emerged to try and remediate and hope that history wouldn’t repeat itself.

But to actually engage with what happened—Evaluation, really, isn’t it? It just didn’t happen. So there’s so many reasons as to why you find yourself in the place you’re in. And yet the basic gospel message, I read the Gospel every day.

I preach on it briefly almost every day. I do it every Sunday. It never ceases to excite or enthuse me.

The gospel message always has an application to the life that we’re living now. There is, in the midst of so much despair in the world, with so much darkness, so much war, so much violence, so many problems, the fact that the person of Jesus Christ has a voice that brings peace, that offers hope, that invites us to faith and discipleship, building community, minding the people on the margins, widows and orphans, to use that expression, and everybody else. Like, there’s such a tension between the absolute validity of the core message and the distressing lack of engagement because our model was a model based on total involvement.

But you still have to get up every day and live the life and do the work.

**Garry:** And in some ways, you know, you could talk about leadership, you could talk about vision, lack of vision, all that, and we won’t, but in some ways, I suppose the whole model is going a particular way because, as you say, resources, lack of priests, lack of money eventually. And it will be, I think Archbishop Eamon Martin spoke about this, about it’ll

be a poor church. But it’ll be probably in a position to do something different because the structures will be gone, the big structures will be gone.

**Fr Joe:** Yeah, I just don’t know. I mean, I find a lot of people my age or older sort of trying to dictate a pattern of life and a future for people who are the age of my nephews and nieces and their children.

**“It’s a message that brings light to darkness and people are drawn towards it. We somehow, I mentioned a moment ago, have created darkness in our faith community”**

I think that next generation will have to discern where does a moral compass come from in their life, how do they set it? I see a lot of the core values of life, of friendship, of family, of fidelity, of love and affection, of neighbourhood and community, of charity. All those things are real in their lives. It’s just the church bit that doesn’t really seem to speak and therefore the gospel bit or the God-orientated bit.

Like we come together on a Sunday morning for the worship and the praise of God, to gather us as holy people, to listen to his word, to celebrate the Eucharist and to go out to bring hope to the world. That’s our common purpose. The smaller we are, maybe there’s better we’ll be at doing what is our fundamental identity.

But Christ’s message has always drawn people to discipleship. It’s a message that brings light to darkness and people are drawn towards it. We somehow, I mentioned a moment ago, have created darkness in our faith community.

And now in time, maybe that cloud can lift and people can rediscover the essence and the truth of the Gospel because that’s what we’re there for. We’re not there to be big and we’re not there to fill churches on Sunday or to collect money or even to support priests. We’re there to proclaim the Gospel.

And I think that’s why priests work on until 70 or 80. Most of my colleagues have not even retired at 75. It’s just a core and fundamental belief in the veracity of what we do, of the need for the thing that we offer, for the relationship with Christ that we’ve nurtured in our lives as something we want to share with others.

And that’s why I just so appreciate this year that we’re in, this jubilee year. Being called pilgrims of hope is a real way to renew all of us in that being our fundamental gift to the world, the gift of hope.



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, April 24, 2025

## Fools for Christ: Pope Francis and the next pope

Jason Conroy

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## A personal journey of Vocation

I remember exactly where I was on August 15, 2004. Sitting in my grandparents' house, all I wanted was to watch Match of the Day. Chelsea had played, and I was eager to see the highlights. But there was no football that morning—RTÉ was broadcasting a Mass from Lourdes, celebrated by a very frail Pope John Paul II. At thirteen, I wasn't impressed. My grandfather, however, watched with reverence. He would often bless himself at the sight of the Holy Father on the news. I didn't fully understand it then, but something about that moment stayed with me.

Fast forward to April 2, 2005. Again, I was in my grandparents' house. We had just finished watching *Winning Streak*, and then the RTÉ News came on. But there was no standard news bulletin. Instead, the screen was filled with images and clips of John Paul II—his life, his travels, his impact. He had died. My grandparents had fond memories of his visit to Ireland in 1979, speaking about how charismatic and youthful he was then. I, too, began to reflect on his legacy. I watched his funeral days later, presided over by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and for the first time, I started paying attention to the deeper meaning of faith, tradition, and leadership in the Church.

### Benedict XVI

On April 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger was elected Pope, taking the name



**His Year of Mercy, his teachings on confession, and his letter to priests in 2019 all have had a profound impact on my ministry, writes Fr Barry White**

Benedict XVI. He looked shy, reserved, intellectual. I wasn't sure what to make of him; he was different.

My first real encounter with theology came through John Paul II's book *Memory and Identity*. I was fascinated by the way he reflected on history, freedom, and the human person. When Benedict became pope, I picked up a book called *Let God's Light Shine Forth*, a collection of his writings. It introduced me to his depth of thought—his reflections on faith, hope, love, eternal life, holiness and the Church.

That book sparked something in me. I discovered theology, a discipline that wove together faith, reason, and philosophy.

Benedict XVI grew on me. At World Youth Day in Cologne (2005), his homilies stood out—simple but profound. He wasn't just an intellectual; he had a deep spirituality that resonated with me more and more, especially as I discerned my vocation to the priesthood.

By the time I attended World

Youth Day in Sydney (2008), I was seriously considering seminary. Benedict's reflections on the priesthood, his Christology, his ecclesiology, and his profound way of presenting the faith inspired me. His insights shaped my understanding of faith and reason, the role of the Church, and, ultimately, my own vocation.

In 2009, I entered the seminary. Benedict's teachings became even more central to my formation. His reflections on liturgy, prayer, the nature of priesthood, and his beautiful series of books entitled *Jesus of Nazareth* deepened my love for theology. He was a teacher, a fatherly guide, a quiet but strong voice of wisdom.

Then, in 2013, he resigned. I was deeply saddened. I had come to love and respect him so much. His humility in stepping down, his quiet acceptance of suffering, and his trust in God's will made a lasting impression on me.

### The Pontificate of Pope Francis

On March 2013, a new face appeared on the balcony of St Peter's - Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis. Once again, I wasn't sure what to make of him. He was different. He didn't fit the mould of John Paul's youthful dynamism or Benedict's scholarly depth. But gradually, I was drawn in.

Pope Francis' vision of the Church as a "poor Church for the poor" and as "a field hospital after battle" has profoundly shaped my faith, vocation, and ministry. His call to 'go to the peripheries' and to be 'shepherds with the smell of the sheep' challenges me to draw close to those on the margins. I am continually moved by his humble reminder: "Who am I to judge?" and consoled by his assurance that "God never tires of forgiving us", "the name of God is mercy", and "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy".

I was in Kraków for World Youth Day 2016, where the theme, 'Blessed be the merciful, for they shall receive mercy' echoed through every gathering. In choosing the name Francis, he aligned himself with the saint of humility and radical love.

By 2018, I found myself in Ethiopia, volunteering and working with young people in the northern part of the country. Francis' encyclicals and exhortations—*Christus Vivit*, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, and especially *Evangelii*

*Gaudium*—challenged me to see the face of Christ in the poor, to deepen my own pastoral approach, and to rediscover the joy of the Gospel.

His 2016 Year of Mercy, his teachings on confession, and his letter to priests in 2019 all have had a profound impact on my ministry. He spoke of the dangers of "spiritual schizophrenia", rigidity, and spiritual amnesia—powerful words that challenged all of us as Christians and as ministers. In many ways, he felt like a wise Jesuit spiritual director, offering guidance, encouragement, and sometimes difficult but necessary challenges.

Today, as a priest, I regularly consult Francis' Angelus messages and homilies when preparing my own. His pastoral heart, his focus on the lived Gospel, his deep sense of prayer and practical love for the vulnerable—all of it continues to shape my vision of priesthood and service. His encyclicals remind me that theology is not confined to books but must animate our love for creation, our relationships, and our world.

We awoke on Monday morning to the news that Pope Francis died peacefully at 7:35am. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, he himself became a pilgrim of hope—a servant who now, by God's mercy, journeys home to the house of the Father.



# The legacy of Pope Francis in our times

## The misunderstanding of technological advancement and human progress



Fr Chris Hayden

**A**s we entrust Pope Francis to the loving mercy of God after his twelve years of Petrine ministry, it is good to ponder aspects of his legacy. One aspect – perhaps among the less obvious ones, but which we can ponder with great gratitude – is the foundation he has laid for reflection on the use of digital media. The late Holy Father has not left a systematic teaching, but in various writings and speeches he has presented wise and humane principles, which can serve as a basis and an impetus for further ethical and pastoral reflection.

In his long and rich Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis wrote that it is possible to be “economically advanced but ethically debilitated.” Likewise, it is possible to be technologically advanced but ethically debilitated, and we see the latter contradiction very clearly in the area of communications, social media and data technology, where the pace of technological development far outstrips the pace of ethical and moral reflection, to the point where making wise and prudent judgments can become

all but impossible. Decades ago, Martin Luther King Jr captured the fact that moral judgment can lag behind technological capacity by observing that in our time, we have guided missiles in the hands of misguided men.

**“Digital technology is no longer something we simply use, one of a range of tools at our disposal”**

When it comes to digital communications technology, it's possible to fall into either of two opposite errors. On the one hand, there is a kind of unthinking, technophobic rejection; on the other, there is a naïve assumption that every development is a blessing. Pope Francis was wise to both these errors; he was neither a technophobe nor a technophile. He was a ‘techno-realist,’ and his realism was deeply rooted in the understanding of human nature which our Christian faith gives us.

Pope Francis observed that digital technology is no longer something we simply use, one of a range of tools at our disposal. It has become something more like a total environment in which we are immersed; it shapes our understanding of the world. To put the matter differently, digital technology is a tool that we have fashioned, but that is now fashioning



Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

us. British philosopher Iris Murdoch wrote that human beings are creatures who make images of themselves, and then come to resemble the images they have created. This is the point we have reached with digital technology, and we need sustained critical reflection in order to chart and guarantee a fully human future.

### Wisdom

A recurrent theme with Pope Francis has been that knowledge and wisdom are not

**“In an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves; in the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a technological dictatorship”**

the same thing: “The flood of information at our fingertips,” he wrote, “does not make for greater wisdom.” There is vastly more to wisdom than the accumulation of a vast amount of data. Digital technology excels at the accumulation and organisation of data, but making sense of what we know is a uniquely human capacity. When we presume to capture our full human reality as a large set of data, we miss the mark entirely: we undermine the very reality we presume to understand, and we risk becoming, in a forceful turn of phrase from the late Holy Father, “fodder for algorithms.”

**“The late Pope wisely reminded us of the ‘need for sustained reflection on the kinds of relationships to which they are steering us’”**

“It is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact.” So wrote Pope Francis in 2019.

These words can help us to be wary of – indeed to unmask – what we might term the Great Digital Myth, which is the notion that communication between human beings consists of the exchange of limitless amounts of information. If we give the matter even a moment of serious thought, could there be anything more dehumanising than understanding human communication as merely the exchange of data? Pope Francis has urged us to keep the full human, personal reality in mind. The human person is a being-in-representation, and regarding digital media, the late Pope wisely reminded us of the “need for sustained reflection on the kinds of relationships to which they are steering us.”

### Communication

In a 2020 Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis made the common-sense observation that “the ability to sit down and listen to others,” is “typical of interpersonal encounters.” This common sense, however, must fight its corner in our present communications context, because, as Pope Francis noted: “As silence and careful listening disappear, replaced by a frenzy of texting, this basic structure of sage human communica-

tion is at risk.” And there, we touch on the heart of Francis’ concern: the very technology that seems to promise something like total communication, total connection, risks – if we do not use it wisely – compromising the very structure of communication. Here, again, ongoing critical reflection is needed if authentic human flourishing is to remain our top priority. Technological advancement does not automatically translate into human progress.

Finally, Pope Francis has urged us not to look to technology “to overcome every limit.” He notes that “in an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves; in the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a technological dictatorship.” Digital technology has brought some undeniable blessings, but like any human achievement, it is limited. We must not expect technology to provide what it cannot provide. It is not, and cannot ever be, our saviour.

May the wisdom which Pope Francis has shared on this theme stimulate a great deal of fruitful and wise reflection. And may he now share in the fullness of the Joy of the Gospel.

## As the Father sent me, so am I sending you

Acts 5:12-16  
Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24  
Rv 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19  
Jn 20:19-31

### The Sunday Gospel

Fr John McCarthy



**G**od is so incredibly merciful – we simply cannot fathom Divine mercy. But the main lesson of today is that hopefully as we begin to understand it – that we also begin to forgive as God forgives.

For a little while St Thomas doubted, but how many millions of times have his words of faith “My Lord and my God” (“mo Thiarna ‘s mo Dhia”) been uttered?

There are times I feel I haven’t earned mercy, but that if the very definition of mercy!

It’s hard to give and receive it. Christ utters “Shalom” in greeting – which means peace at every level of our being. He then confers the ability, the authority – in His name – to forgive others their sins. He breathes the Holy Spirit on them – the breath of life as it were – resuscitating sinners.

There can be no real

peace without forgiveness. Are there blockages in me still? But if I have known forgiveness and if I have likewise forgiven, not only is it peace-giving but it is really ‘powerful.’

“Peace be with you always” is addressed to us at every Mass as we also hear the words of Christ – “my own peace I give you” – at the sign of peace. At the conclusion of Mass we hear “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

May we spread peace, and happiness this Easter week – and above all, the joy that we and others have been forgiven. Alleluia!



# Fools for Christ: Pope Francis and the next pope



We've just celebrated the Resurrection. Christ has opened the gates of Heaven, and we will be praying that He receives Pope Francis swiftly into His Kingdom, as I'm sure He will, **Jason Conroy** writes

I remember seeing Pope Francis at World Meeting of Families back in 2018. His reserved reception of the higher echelons of Irish society in Dublin Castle contrasted nicely with his off-script and familiar remarks to us who went to see him in Croke Park. I felt like he was standing up for us who have gotten used to being the butt end of things for the past while. Of course, the atmosphere then was very different to that of John Paul II's visit in '79 and the 1.25 million who attended Mass, all gathered around the Papal Cross in Phoenix Park. A plaque was left on the little hill there with his parting words for us here in Ireland: "May you convert every day." A memory of happier times. Pope Francis' visit, like his more recent trip to Belgium, was characterised, not by a feel-good atmosphere of excitement— even Pope Benedict had been more warmly welcomed in his visit to the UK in 2010 – but by snipes from the great and good of national politics and commentary, and quite a low turnout at the Mass. A sign of the times.

Perhaps the most iconic moment of Pope Francis' papacy, for me, was that image of him during the extraordinary Urbi et Orbi in 2020, standing alone in St Peter's square in the evening rain during the first months of the Coronavirus lockdown. In many ways, it's a good image of the plight of Our Lord 2000 years ago, the one good man left bearing the weight of the world on His shoulders, and it more and more resembles the plight of the followers of



Pope Francis holds the monstrance as he delivers his extraordinary blessing 'urbi et orbi' (to the city and the world). The service was livestreamed during the coronavirus pandemic. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media.

Christ today, who can often feel like they are flying the flag alone in a faithless and indifferent world.

**“Like St Peter and everyone who takes up their cross to follow Jesus, however often we fall we can rise again, because Christ has risen again”**

I am probably not the only young Catholic who has often felt a bit of a fool for flying this flag, especially on matters of sexual morality, probably one of the most visible or obtrusive differences setting faithful Catholics apart from others and causing friction with non-Catholics. We are often thought to be a bit quaint at best, or strange and repressed at worst, by those who don't share our faith in

the risen Lord.

Of course, the teachings of Our Lord and his apostles about authentic and inauthentic love, abstinence outside of marriage, about divorce, about artificial contraception, and about the challenge to overcome ourselves, to guard our hearts, to resist the pressures to conform to the practices and attitudes of the world instead of to Christ— “These are hard sayings. Who can listen to them?”

They are hard. And we don't always succeed in following them. But, like St Peter and everyone who takes up their cross to follow Jesus, however often we fall we can rise again, because Christ has risen again. In the letters of St John in Revelations, we see Our Lord calling us to “conquer.” “To the one who conquers, I will grant them to sit with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” We who are the witnesses of the reality of the Resurrection of

the Christ, are ourselves the proof that He has risen and still walks among us, when by His power we fight and, eventually, conquer in that struggle to really live as He lived— usually involving lots of trips to Confession on the way, which is nothing at all to be ashamed of. We do also have some great helps in the sacraments, prayer, and the help of our friends in all this.

## Backlash

So, sticking up for the Church's teachings on these things today is often a thankless job to say the least! But it is somewhat disheartening to find that, while lots of us are often facing some backlash – like owning up to my views to my friends during the 2015 Marriage referendum here, or trying to explain the wisdom of these positions to skeptics – it can make one feel a bit foolish, if while you're taking flak for these things, there are priests and bishops and other leaders of our Church who are fairly scuppering such views, sometimes in uncertain and

**“I'll be hoping, and praying, for a pope who will be a great witness, and make really clear in the Church— yes, the great love and forgiveness of the Lord for us, but also the great and bracing challenges He has given us”**

sometimes in no uncertain terms, so that people no longer think that the orthodox teaching is the authentic Catholic position (whether they agree or disagree with it), but that it is rather merely one among many acceptable positions for a Catholic. Sadly, for some leaders in the Church, adhering to the Catechism of the Catholic Church is merely a 'conservative' position, on one end of the scale of positions, held by more 'radical' or 'rigorist' Catholics, and no more valid as Catholic teaching than the more 'liberal' positions, which prefer to say that everything is a matter for 'personal discernment.' I personally don't know how I can convince anyone about the Church's teachings, or even that they are the Church's teachings, when they can point to many priests and prelates of said Church who are saying precisely the opposite. To most people, the claim that there is one clear teaching of the Lord can't be taken seriously, if even lead-

ers of the Church can't seem to agree on what it is.

We've just celebrated the Resurrection – Christ has opened the gates of Heaven, and we will be praying that He receives Pope Francis swiftly into His Kingdom, as I'm sure he will.

Easter is also the time of fresh starts. Our Lord said to the apostles: “You are the witnesses of my suffering and resurrection to the whole world.” That's a job not only for the Pope, but for all of us— and we need all the help we can get! And I know that I'll be hoping, and praying, for a pope who will be a great witness, and make really clear in the Church— yes, the great love and forgiveness of the Lord for us, but also the great and bracing challenges He has given us, the fight He's given us to fight, the graces by which we can conquer, and the rewards He has promised us if we imitate Him: in other words, a pope who will be our captain and our comrade in the good fight.

**“To most people, the claim that there is one clear teaching of the Lord can't be taken seriously, if even leaders of the Church can't seem to agree on what it is”**



# TVRadio

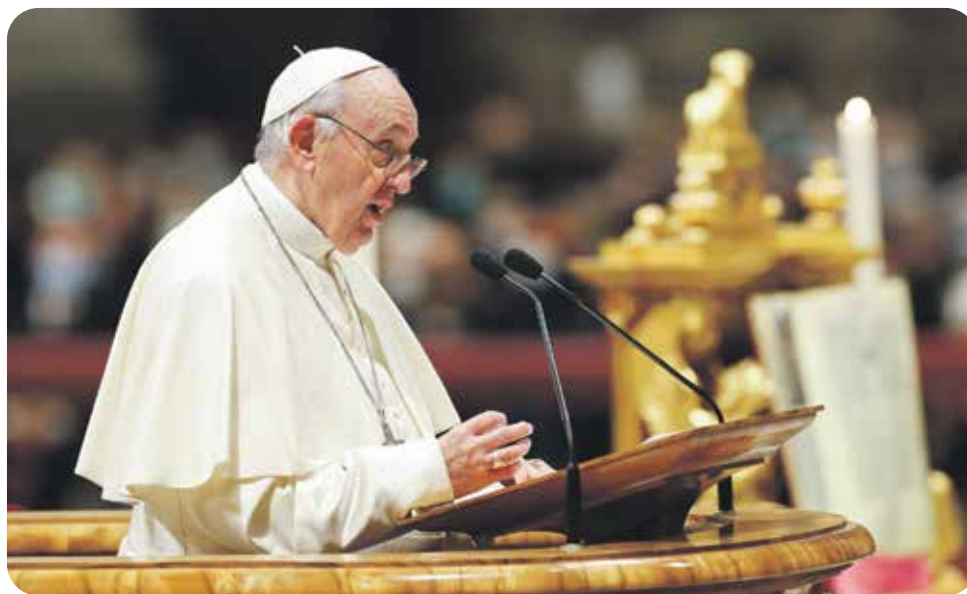
Brendan O'Regan



## The imperative to recall the faith we profess

I write this column in a state of shock – at the dramatic news of the death of Pope Francis. I saw the sad news breaking on **Sky News** last Monday morning. The general reaction was one of shock but not surprise, given the Pontif's ill-health.

Last Sunday, watching the coverage of the Easter ceremonies from the Vatican was inspiring, as Pope Francis made what must have been a huge effort to participate. When he gave the final blessing to those gathered in St Peter's Square and those tuning in from around the world I wondered if indeed it would be his last time, but I wasn't expecting his death to happen so soon. It now feels as if he struggled on through ill-health to fulfil his Easter duties and felt then that he could go in peace. Though he did the blessing, and amazingly one last tour of St Peter's Square, he left an incisive 'Urbi et Orbi' address, delivered by an assistant. He cut through the awful conflicts going on in the world, touching on each crisis with sharp insight. He flew the flag for peace in general and for cease-fires in particular. He criticised warmongers for see people as 'targets' rather than 'persons'. He remembered the vulnerable, from the unborn child in the womb to the elderly in danger of being discarded. All those political leaders issu-



Pope Francis gives the homily during an evening prayer service in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican December 31, 2021. Photo: CNS/Remo Casilli, Reuters.

ing statements of admiration and sympathy over these few days will do well to study that address.

I watched the **Urbi et Orbi** programme on BBC One as I wanted to get the blessing live – RTÉ was showing it on delay. It was so moving, but I just didn't realise just how historical it would be in retrospect. I was impressed by the initial coverage of Monday's sad news on Sky News and ITV News in particular – there was great respect and dignity. I liked Michael Kelly's contributions to various programmes, e.g. on **News at One** (RTÉ Radio 1), when he spoke of the Pope's 'pastoral

heart' and how he related so well to ordinary people. On the same show we heard from Archbishop Eamonn Martin about how Pope Francis had a special place for those on the peripheries and was critical of any assault on human life. Reporter Colm Flynn's contributions were positive – e.g. on **Late Breakfast** (Newstalk), with all the inevitable talk about succession and conclaves, he reminded us of the role we believe the Holy Spirit has in the coming proceedings. Of course there will be political aspects, and on the same show Archbishop Diarmuid Martin frankly reminded us

that there were those who didn't like Pope Francis. In fact, I'm frequently sickened by the level of vitriol directed against the Holy Father (on social media of course). Through the morning **Sky News** continued with excellent and sustained coverage as the glowing tributes poured in. One of their commentators referred to the 'moral awareness' raised by Pope Francis. There was also a **BBC News Special** with ongoing coverage, and eventually a **News Special** on the RTÉ News channel. The commentary on RTÉ seemed to be primarily from liberal commentators.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### JUBILEE FOR TEENAGERS: AN EWTN SPECIAL

EWTN Saturday April 26, 9am

From Rome, join teenagers from across the world as they begin the Jubilee for Teenagers, a weekend filled with prayer and the Holy Sacraments.

#### THE SIMPSONS

Channel 4 Sunday April 27, 1.55pm

Homer the Heretic: Homer has a vision from God and decides to start his own religion, which doesn't go down well with the neighbours. (S4 Ep3/22)

#### FILM: HIDDEN FIGURES

Film 4 Sunday April 27, 6:25pm and Friday May 2, 6:25pm

(2016) Fact-based drama about three extraordinary women, whose genius in mathematics and engineering made a significant contribution to the space race.

Last Monday also, it was a brave move to broadcast a one-hour programme on the Nicene Creed on the night of a public holiday. I enjoyed this special edition of **Our Divine Sparks** (RTÉ, Radio 1), though I'd have to be a theologian and scripture scholar to make a proper judgement. I thought there was too much of the political and not enough of the spiritual in the discussion, but it was informative about the various efforts to combat heresies and define the nature of God, especially in relation to the divinity of Jesus. And there were other decisions, less well known – e.g. about the date of Easter (a heated debate, apparently).

The vox pops were inter-

esting – one person described how unsatisfactory it was just to rhyme off the Creed, while another referred to it in terms of solidarity. Fifth Year girls from a Clare secondary school had a variety of reactions, and I wondered about their Religious Education or the youth culture that might have overwhelmed it. One related the Creed to guilt. Another thought you'd have to re-write the Bible to make changes to the Creed. But there were also insights too from the girls. One thought there was a need for more conversations about the Creed, another like the idea of everyone in church praying it together.

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Plethora of broken lives in Drug-Based thriller

Two worlds. In one of them a tinpot Don Corleone called Power (Aidan Gillen) presides over a ruthless drugs ring. In the other, shellshocked ex-Afghanistan soldier Danny (Luke McQuillan) makes a bid for shared custody of his son with his long-suffering wife Gill (Jade Jordan), aided by kind-hearted social worker Kate (Louise Bourke) after a careless accident renders him homeless.

Director Mark O'Connor (*Cardboard Gangsters*) coalesces both worlds in *Amongst the Wolves* (16), a film so real you feel at times you're watching a documentary. Such is the manner in which horrific fiction has morphed into horrific fact in

our sometime island of saints and scholars.

Ireland has been in the grip of the drug 'culture' (to use that ridiculous expression) for many moons now. A number of directors have tried to portray this with varying degrees of credibility. O'Connor knocks it out of the park with a visceral combination of heart, muscle and firepower.

I find it hard to recommend a film like this. It's so violent it will turn many people's stomachs in the way Quentin Tarantino's ones do. But it demands to be seen. It demands to be seen because it illustrates how far we've descended towards an at times animalistic society where lives are casually dis-



Amongst the Wolves

pensed with for thirty pieces of silver – or thirty bags of cocaine.

Gillen has been playing the bad guy for so long you feel some day he'll be tempted to phone it in. Fear not. There's

always some twist with this brilliant actor to make the nefariousness new. Here it's the veiled threats, the almost shy smile, the crushed velvet voice of a baby-faced killer.

I mentioned Don Corleone.

When we first see Marlon Brando playing that character in *The Godfather* he isn't drilling someone dead. He's cradling a cat. The secret of doing villains is not to throw your weight around a la James Cagney. When things are played down it makes them even more ominous.

McQuillan, doubling up on co-writing duties with O'Connor, is excellent as the powder keg waiting to explode, an 'angel of death' reminiscent of Robert De Niro's Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver* as he tries to prise vulnerable teen Will (Daniel Fee) away from the straitjacket of 'dealing'.

Will is mired in the crosshairs of Power's mini-empire due to a family debt, the

unfortunate legacy of his dead father, another tragic figure in O'Connor's mosaic of dysfunctionality.

The only fault with the film is the sanitisation of its last five minutes. If Danny did to Power's gang in real life what he does in the film he wouldn't be where we see him here. He'd either be dead or in The Witness Protection Scheme.

O'Connor should have ended his *Armageddon* of horror a little earlier. He brings us so far into its spine-chilling underbelly we should have been left reeling there without the anodyne finale.

This is a minor quibble about a nail-biting odyssey into a contemporary Hades.





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



# The late Pope Francis a man of literature

Peter Costello

**P**ope Francis was a quite unique figure, a pastor whose achievements and teachings will come to be more and more appreciated in the decades, even centuries to come.

Through him the Catholic Church, perhaps even the wider realm of Christianity as a whole, in all its varieties, may find a new and fitting direction, replete with all the graces of caritas, and the essential verities of the gospels.

I believe that many of his unique qualities were born of his Argentinian origin and his deep appreciation of the nature of man as reflected in both the gospels and in literature.

The late pope, both as a reader and a writer, will be commented upon briefly in these pages today. In any future biography of the late pope - and there will be many - Francis's love of literature will be a focal point of interest.

## Literature

I think that among the recent popes of the last hundred years or so Pope Francis was the one most affected by the insights of literature; this was among those personal qualities that enabled Jorge Mario Bergoglio, over his eight decades of life to communicate so feelingly on a human level with so many different kinds of people around the world, and not merely with "people of faith". And which brought him at the end of a well filled life into the Papacy.

In his recently published book *I Want You to Be Happy* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99) it comes as a pleasant surprise to see just how many of his religious teachings depend not only on scripture, but also on literature.

Some 23 writers from St Augustine to Virgil, by way of Dante, J. L. Borges, G. K. Chesterton, John Donne,

Hölderlin, J. M. Hopkins, Alessandro Manzoni, Boris Pasternak, and J. R. Tolkien: in the pages of his autobiography these and others such as Eduardo Galeno, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Mario Soldati, Tolstoy and Charles Péguy make their appearance. His literary tastes were distinctly European rather than Anglo-American.

The debt to Manzoni, whose *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), in the definitive version 1841, the formative book of the modern Italian imagination, is particularly great.

**“Hatred persisted in leads to the loss of everything; hates casts one beyond the blessing of God, no matter what good fortune comes to you”**

In a passage in *Hope*, that assembly of memories which was subtitled 'an autobiography' (though it is not an autobiography in the usual sense), Pope Francis relates how his grandmother Nonna Rosa made him learn "off by heart" as we used to say, the famous opening lines of the novel:

"That branch of the Lake of Como, which turns toward the south between two unbroken chains of mountains, presenting to the eye a succession of bays and gulfs, formed by their jutting and retiring ridges, suddenly contracts itself between a headland to the right and an extended sloping bank on the left, and assumes the flow and appearance of a river..."

And so on ... The grown man realised later that the novel "was a great gift. I've read it four times and I still keep it by my desk, to reread. It has given much to me."

Indeed, it is difficult for

people in other cultures to realise the importance which Manzoni has for Italians, wherever they are, from Piedmont to Patagonia. Perhaps only the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz provides a counterpart in a similar culture building novel.

Here Francis is alluding to a passage in the novel where a Capuchin monk "who has learned that the science of pragmatism that is the true wisdom and being close to the people", warns Rienzi, the chief character, that

hatred persisted in leads to the loss of everything; hates casts one beyond the blessing of God, no matter what good fortune comes to you."

## Cinema

For Francis from his earliest years, the cinema was also an immense influence, but only when it followed the norms he had learned from the 19th century literary classics. In Francis's own life the Italian neorealist movement in the cinema that emerged after WWII, served as extension of the human-

ism he found in Manzoni.

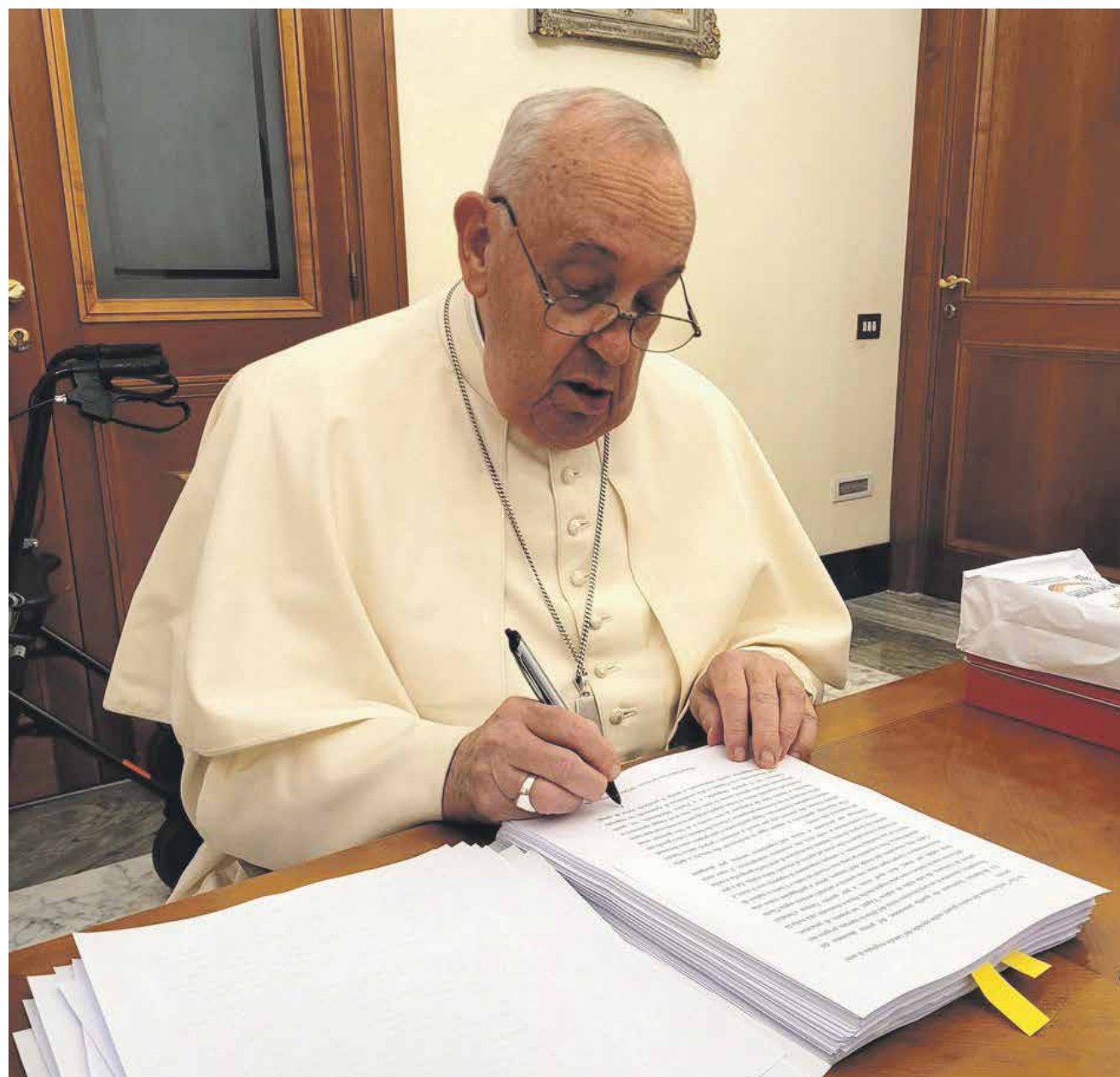
His parents took their children to see all the films of that period, those Robert Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti and their associates. He later wrote that "I am convinced that the neo-realism of postwar Italian cinema is a great school of humanism."

He especially notes De Sica's film of 1943 *I bambini ci guardano* (*The Children are Watching Us*), based on a novel by Cesare Giulio Viola. Dealing as it did with the effect on a small boy of

marital discord, he often mentioned this film in his homilies for marriages he celebrated.

**“Francis took both literature and life with a deep seriousness that found at all times a vein of humour”**

He also admired Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945) and Fellini's *La Strada* (1954). His love of the



The Pope at his desk working on the text of a recent book



Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

# Francis was and love

cinema, much like his love of soccer, is an aspect of his outlook and awareness of what people really enjoyed and profited from that again his biographers will explore.

Francis noted that at the time these films were attacked, even by the clergy, "but every age has its exemplars of ostentatious piety that freezes, perhaps at the sight of an exuberant woman bathing in the Trevi Fountain that there is a truth that digs deep, typical of true art." (This is an allusion to the film *La Dolce Vita*.)

He later came to accept the comment of Pier Paolo Pasolini that in reality *La Dolce Vita* dealt in fact with the relationship between sin and innocence, and was moreover, "the highest product of Catholicism in these recent years". (Pasolini was, of course, the director of the very remarkable *Il vangelo secondo Matteo – The Gospel According to St Matthew* in 1964).

Francis took both literature and life with a deep seriousness that found at all times a vein of humour to put those he met quickly at their ease, be they small children or those with many years of experience.

## Soul

In these two recent books one is aware that Pope Francis avoids many of the pitfalls of writing the story of one's life. It is too easy to drown in essential details, or in the inevitable controversies. But his narratives proceed with some skill he reveals not just the nature of Argentina, but also the soul of Europe. The repulsion he feels for war throbs through

the early pages.

A striking feature of how this book is written is the way in which it is broken down into short passages and scenes, rather than the sort of conventional narrative that a ghost writer might have imposed on him. In this way it resembles the scenario of a film, indeed one can imagine in the hands of a director, like those he admired in the neo-realist tradition, making a film out of it.

**“He reminds us to follow St Augustine’s maxim: ‘Return to yourself. In our interior the truth resides’”**

When the public encounters papal writings it is usually in the form of official documents such as encyclicals. His important encyclical *Laudato Si’* of necessity had to follow the traditional manner of such a Vatican document.

But its theme on our duties to the natural world, speaking of the environment around us as our “common home”, struck a chord with millions around the world, as indeed do many of his pronouncements. They are not in line with the political tone of many politicians both in Europe and the United States these days, but they have inspired many ordinary people, which was the intention.

But that other recent book *I Want You to Be*

*Happy* is perhaps more open about his ideas, starting as it does with a section called “Fifteen Steps toward Happiness” – the first four pages summarise not only what the book was aiming to achieve, but what perhaps the arc of the life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio also achieved.

The very first piece, “Read the book of life”, he reminds us to follow St Augustine’s maxim: “Return to yourself. In our interior the truth resides.” The contents of the book then fill out the scenario of the autobiography, by suggesting a full and active engagement with ourselves, with others, with the “common home” around us, and indeed with the Creator of all that we can see and know.

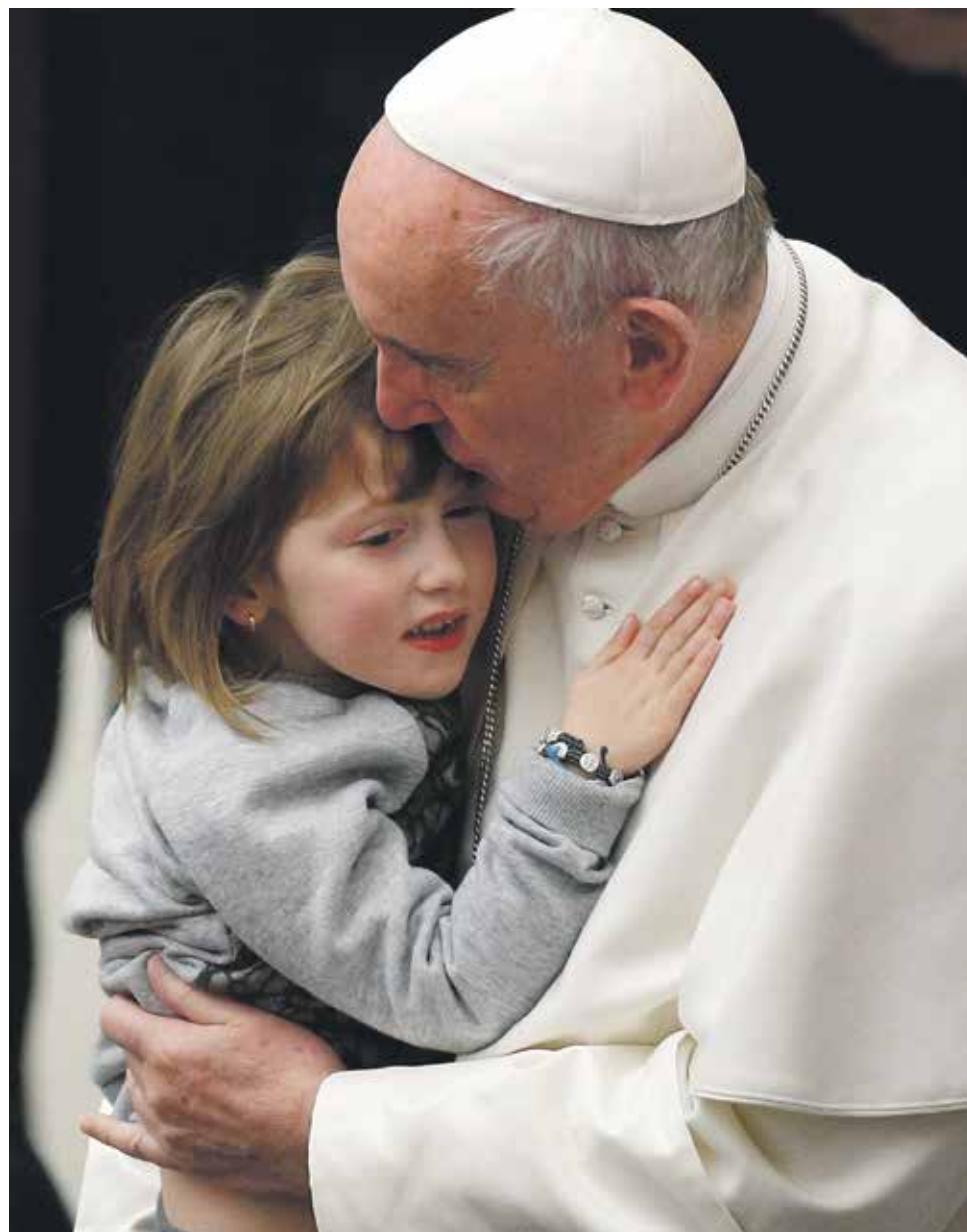
## Inspiration

To understand the spiritual legacy of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, his current admirers and his future biographers would do well to turn first to the literary legacy of Pope Francis.

In these pages I can only hint at the rich contents of that legacy, one which was fully fulfilled by 2001 when he offered his resignation as a bishop to the Pope on reaching the age of 75. In a worldly way he had completed his career; but in a curious way the remaining years of his life were to achieve through his new opportunity to communicate with people the spiritual mission to which he was called when he was ordained in 1969.

Reading these two books to write these pages I am struck by their lasting quali-

**“Francis noted that at the time these films were attacked, even by the clergy, ‘but every age has its exemplars of ostentatious piety that freezes, perhaps at the sight of an exuberant woman bathing in the Trevi Fountain that there is a truth that digs deep, typical of true art’”**



Pope Francis kisses a child while meeting the disabled during his general audience in Paul VI hall at the Vatican, January 20, 2016.

**“Let us accept the Lord’s invitation without resistance. Only by opening ourselves to his mercy will we find true life and true joy”**

ties. They are both far more interesting than might have been imagined reading some of the reviews. Perhaps that is a warning to readers, do not believe all that you read in the literary pages of the papers.

The two books are, in their own manner, remarkable works of the human spirit, informed as they are by the deepest currents of religious feeling and human sympathy.

**“In his life reading and writing provided a quintessence of the Christian view of the way, the truth, and the life we are called to follow”**

Pope Francis has certainly left us a rich literary heritage. He is an example of just how literature can enter into people’s lives, illuminating them, allowing them to understand both the life and spirit of human beings

in the face of their Creator.

If nothing else – and there was in fact much else – in his life reading and writing provided a quintessence of the Christian view of the way, the truth, and the life we are called to follow. The writings of Pope Francis present his reading of literature and life as he has lived them mainly as plain Jose Mario Bergoglio, simply as human being.

## An envoy from Pope Francis

On Easter Sunday the sung Mass in Haddington Road was packed to the door, standing room only. It was in a way a thrilling sight. One felt that for all that is said and done, the life of Christians still seemed to be flourishing in some essential way.

Now this morning seeking some final words from Pope Francis we cannot do better than turn to the final passages in his recent book *I want You to Be Happy*, which carries in their substance the heart of his message to the city and the world, to all

people of good faith:

“How often we have felt the need for a change that would affect our entire person! How often have we said to ourselves, ‘I need to change; I can’t keep on like this. My life is leading nowhere, it will never bear fruit, it’s all pointless, I’ll never be happy.’ How often have we had these thoughts! And Jesus, who is nearby, always reaches out to us and says, ‘Come, come to me. I will do the work: I will change your heart, I will change your life, I will make you happy.’”

“Jesus, who is with us, invites us to change our life. It is he, with the Holy Spirit, who sows in us this restlessness to change our lives and become better people.”

“Let us accept the Lord’s invitation without resistance. Only by opening ourselves to his mercy will we find true life and true joy. All we have to do is open the door – he will do the rest. He does everything; we just have to open our hearts. He can heal us and help us move forward. I assure you that we will all be happier.”



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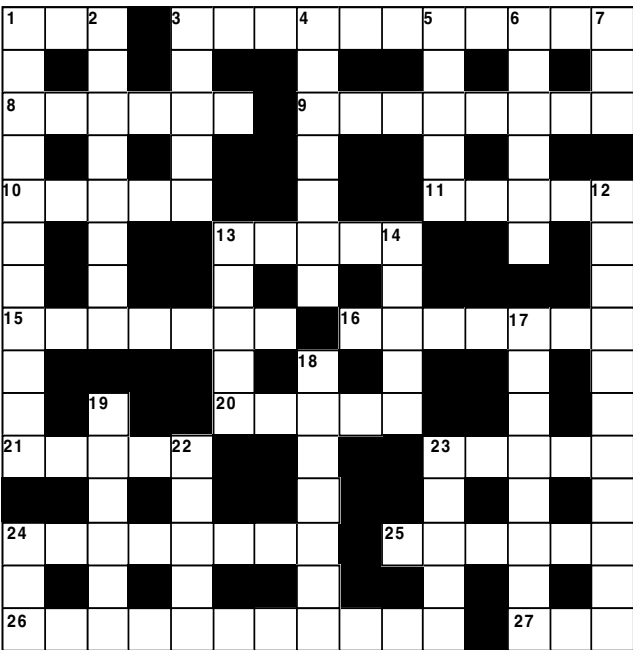
### Across

- 1 Pub (3)  
3 Use it to find the length of something (4,7)  
8 & 18d Light them in the period when Christmas is coming (6,7)  
9 A check on attendance at school (4,4)  
10 Rotates (5)  
11 Latin dance or sauce (5)  
13 Air-filled cavity in the skull associated with the nose (5)  
15 One who abhors technological advances (7)  
16 Sum of money put by (4-3)  
20 Wooden board (5)  
21 Haughty (5)  
23 Pet name for Saint

- Nicholas (5)  
24 On time (8)  
25 Cave or recess containing a religious statue (6)  
26 Instruction called when a vessel is doomed to sink (7,4)  
27 Perish (3)

### Down

- 1 Restorative slumber (6,5)  
2 Religious title (8)  
3 An aid to picking up coal or sugar (5)  
4 Item of jewellery, often part of a pair (7)  
5 Book of maps (5)  
6 Incapable (6)  
7 Snakelike fish (3)  
12 When you buy this there's no knowing what exactly you've bought (1,3,2,1,4)



- 13 Establish (3,2)  
14 Cut of meat (5)  
17 Emerged (8)  
18 See 8 across  
19 Historic Balkan kingdom (6)  
22 Had romantic meetings (5)  
23 Small piece of material, or a fight (5)  
24 Vegetable found in a pod (3)

## SOLUTIONS, APRIL 17

### EASTER BUMPER CROSSWORD, GORDIUS No. 711

#### Across

1. Budgerigar 6. Stable lads 11. Scrumpy 14. Vague 15. Expected 17. Mary Magdalene 20. Saint Veronica 21. Rostrum 24. Let 25. Le Carré 26. Art Deco 27. Age 29. Soil 31. Stunts 34. Eras 37. Attack 38. Faith 39. Simon of Cyrene 41. Reader 44. Needle 46. Wax 47. Wariness 49. Mirth 50. Sorrow 51. Apse 52. Ascent 55. Vocalists 57. Demise 58. Daphne 59. Seer 60. Mined 62. Nil 63. Wrong 66. Bee 67. Eft 68. Ideal 69. Via Dolorosa 71. Motif 75. Trio 76. Nettle 78. Exiled 79. Engraving 80. Lychee 81. Mint 84. Jethro 85. Copse 87. Strutted 89. Hug 90. Niggle 94. Delphi 96. Redeemer 98. Maxim 99. Actor 101. Layman 102. Over 104. Stigma 107. Tea 109. Odd 111. Vanilla 112. Man 113. Atheist 114. Gorse 117. The Last Supper 119. Deeds 120. Designs 121. Disregards 122. Step by step

#### Down

2. Digestif 3. Eyelid 4. Inert 5. Aspirin 7. The Prodigal Son 8. Lamp 9. Lurk 10. Sparta 11. Saddle 12. Relocate 13. Mind reader 16. Casks 18. Weak 19. Fast and abstinence 22. Major 23. Ate 24. Loaf 28. Germs 30. Land 31. Stressed 32. The Good Thief 33. The Robe 35. Roars 36. Scent 37. Ant 42. Adroit 43. The sign of the cross 45. Easter egg 47. Wind 48. Sickie 49. Malawi 53. Tap 55. Vent 56. Scourging 60. Meath 61. Dam 64. Please 65. Ovoids 66. Bang 70. Ill 72. The Turin Shroud 73. Bishop 77. Eyed 78. Everest 82. Duomo 83. Stare 86. Polyanthus 88. There 92. Hen 93. Garda 95. Ham 96. Rawlplug 97. Even 100. Reverent 101. Love 103. Row 104. Sligo 105. Introit 107. Tarsus 108. Amused 110. Friday 114. Grasp 115. Spur 116. Drug

## Sudoku Corner 580

### Easy

			1	8				
		8				4	3	2
				9	7			
7		9			4		5	3
	4						7	
6	1		9			2		4
		5	7					
9	3	4				1		
				9	6			

### Hard

	2	4		6				
			2			9		3
		7	1	9		6	2	
	1	8						9
6			8		9			1
7						8	6	
	4	5		8	3	7		
8		9			2			
				1		4	5	

### April 10's Easy 578

8	3	6	2	5	9	4	1	7
2	4	9	7	1	6	5	3	8
5	1	7	8	4	3	2	9	6
9	7	4	6	3	1	8	2	5
1	8	3	4	2	5	7	6	9
6	2	5	9	8	7	1	4	3
4	9	2	3	7	8	6	5	1
7	6	1	5	9	4	3	8	2
3	5	8	1	6	2	9	7	4

### April 10's Hard 578

7	4	2	9	5	8	6	3	1
3	5	9	1	6	7	2	8	4
1	6	8	2	4	3	9	5	7
6	1	4	8	7	2	5	9	3
9	2	5	4	3	1	8	7	6
8	3	7	6	9	5	1	4	2
2	8	3	7	1	9	4	6	5
4	7	1	5	8	6	3	2	9
5	9	6	3	2	4	7	1	8



## Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



# A treasure of life and love

Among the vast corpus of Pope Francis' encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, letters and homilies, there are many inspiring and memorable quotations that he left us as part of his spiritual and pastoral legacy.

One quote I believe will be remembered for many years to come and will guide the Church's self-understanding and mission long into the future is found in his first apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* whose themes he returned to time and time again in his pontificate: "We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love" (para. 265).

The appeal of this quote is the confidence Pope Francis places in the power of the Gospel that contains the truth and love the world is waiting to know and see. Instead of the Church adopting a defensive or



Pope Francis kisses a baby after his weekly audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, November 6, 2013. Photo: CNS/Tony Gentile, Reuters.

conflictual stance against alternative world visions and philosophies, Francis encourages all the baptised to be bold by joining him in sharing the gift that contains the key to human happiness and fulfilment. This gift of Gospel joy he describes as "a treasure of life", underlining the Gospel as something beautiful, attractive and life-enhancing.

It is also a 'treasure of love' that satisfies the deepest desire of every human being which is to love and be loved in return. It is a message which 'cannot deceive' because it concerns itself with all that is true including the truth of who God

is and who we are. Anticipating the theme of this Jubilee Year and quoting from St Paul's letter to the Romans, the Gospel is "a message which cannot mislead or disappoint" because it raises our hopes towards ultimate union with the God who is the fulfillment of all hope.

For Francis, the Good News of Jesus Christ engages us at every level of our being, "to the depths of our hearts". And just like the Spirit of God that sustains us in life at every moment, the joy of the Gospel upholds us and confers an immeasurable dignity upon us,

beyond what we can imagine.

Likewise, the Gospel is never stale or static. It is "never out of date" because it is given for the present moment and when it is most needed. For this reason, the Gospel offers eternal newness, refreshment and renewal to those who receive it. With the Gospel, each of us and the whole Church becomes a new creation. When Francis talked about the Gospel "reaching that part of us which nothing else can reach", he brought us back to the uniqueness of the Gospel message as the most important of all. He reminded the Church that she is not another NGO or business who competes in a market of fleeting needs.

He reminded us that we are in the business of evangelisation and saving souls by helping to connect people to the saving mystery of God's truth and love that is deep within them and accessible through faith. In the words of St Augustine: "You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they test in thee."

In this quote from Francis that packs so much into a few lines, the solid foundations of his claims

are on the Biblical understanding of who the human person is – a creature made in the image and likeness of God who is known by God and loved by God. And in our current state of imperfection, incompleteness and the sadness that comes with that, it is the infinite love of God that will heal all wounds and replace every sadness with eternal joy.

With this one paragraph from 'The Joy of the Gospel', Pope Francis captured the essence and core of our faith. He has inspired us to share the joy of our faith, not because we have to, but because we want to because it is indeed a treasure of life and love. And for doing so, we will be forever grateful to Papa Bergoglio.



## This Easter, please help the people of Myanmar

The two earthquakes, whose epicentres were located near the cities of Mandalay and Sagaing, have caused great devastation. At present, the death toll is believed to be around 5,350, with 7,860 injured and hundreds more reported missing. Fr Henry is in charge of the Archdiocese of Mandalay's emergency response team. He writes to the Little Way, "The situation is terrible. At present, the most important needs are humanitarian assistance such as food, medicine, temporary shelter, and hygiene kits. Many people will need help for a long time, before they can start to rebuild their homes and lives."

**The Little Way Association will forward, without deduction, every euro you send to Priests and Sisters known to us in Myanmar to provide basic humanitarian aid and to help families rebuild their lives. Please give what you can, and pray for Myanmar, going through a harsh period of war and natural disaster. The needs are immense. To donate online go to [littlewayassociation.com](http://littlewayassociation.com)**



We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and blessed Easter.

### A NOVENA OF MASSES FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

We are arranging for a Novena of Masses to be offered for your intentions during Eastertide as a mark of gratitude for your kindness and support.

**May Our Risen Saviour bring you His richest blessings, peace and joy.**

### MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends are gratefully received and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

**We like to send a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass**

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **MYANMAR EMERGENCY APPEAL**

€..... **HUNGRY AND SICK IN KENYA**

€..... **WELLS / CLEAN WATER**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no. ....)

We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass

€..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN. EXPENSES**

To donate online go to  
[www.littlewaysassociation.com](http://www.littlewaysassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

IC/04/24