

With all his heart, and with all his understanding, and with all his strength...(Mark 12:33) *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* (2 Timothy 4:7) Right to the very end! With everything he had! Last Thursday—Holy Thursday—Pope Francis visited Rome's Regina Coeli prison. He was too weak to wash the prisoners' feet, but even in his weakness, he found the strength to be with those who are of little value in the eyes of the world. On Sunday—Easter Sunday—he would summon the strength to greet the faithful from the Balcony of St Peter's Basilica, and afterwards find the generosity of spirit to greet the crowd in St Peter's Square itself. From his first appearance on the balcony of St Peter's the night of his election, to his last, hours before his death, his was a papacy of radical presence to all God's people. His was a living out of the prophecy of the Lord: "there will be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16) And people could feel this: we could feel his connection with us and his concern for us, his welcome for his brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis's life has been a radical dedication to the gospel. Throughout his pontificate, he modelled and preached God's good news of justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Being a child of immigrants, he knew first-hand the hardships facing those forced to leave their homeland, and his papacy became one of compassion, commitment, and action for migrants and those facing disadvantage worldwide: after one of the many tragic drownings of migrants in the Mediterranean, a few weeks after his election, he insisted on going to the island of Lampedusa: "I felt that I had to come here today, to pray and to offer a sign of my closeness, but also to challenge our consciences lest this tragedy be repeated." (Lampedusa Homily, 9 July 2013)

His "challenge to our consciences" did not stop with those people would prefer to ignore, but in his very South American way, he read beneath the surface (see Luke 5:4), and sought to open the ears and the hearts of world to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor: "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature," he would argue in *Laudato Si*, his ground-breaking encyclical of 2015 (here paragraph 139). The climate crisis and the crisis of our humanity go hand in hand. The living God is the God of the poor. Francis had come to see this, and he strove that the whole Church might see it too. His heart and his imagination were spiritual and pastoral in equal measure. Only a pastor would or could describe the Church as a "field hospital." Only someone truly grounded in the Spirit could invite the priests and people to contemplate the words of a mid-century central European poet of Jewish heritage, speaking of "the mysterious and indissoluble sacramental union between the divine Word and our human words How can we fail to reflect on the words left us by the poet Paul Celan: 'Those who truly learn to see, draw close to what is unseen.' " (Letter on the Role of Literature on Formation, No 44. 17 July 2024)

With the *Synod on Synodality* (October 2022–October 2024), he led the Church in plumbing the depths of its renewal that began in the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). His Ignatian spirituality with its emphasis on the need for discernment—and indeed his own shortcomings in leadership in his early life as a Jesuit—brought home to him the need for people to journey together in our search to follow Christ and serve our neighbour. His way of leading—profound humility matched with deep conviction, spreading the practice of discernment and synodality in the governance and life of the Church—is moving the Church in unprecedented ways. For the first time a pope gave

synod-voting rights to members of the Church other than bishops. Importantly, he has given not only a voice, but real executive power to women within the structures of the Roman Curia. We see the same movement in the nomination of new voices to the College of Cardinals, voices from younger, smaller Churches, voices from the margins. Once again, his way was not just words and hopes, but action. Genuine empowerment is life-giving: when people are truly empowered, the Church becomes more fully the sacrament of our Risen Lord—the “flame divided but undimmed, [the] pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God,” as we sing in the *Exultet*, our Easter song of wonder and praise.

Beyond the Church too, his way was one of seeing, judging, and *acting*. “I have experienced your gift of friendship and wisdom, for which I thank the Lord,” he would write to his close Jewish friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires. He was remarkable in reaching out to Islam, seeking common ground. One thinks especially of his meeting with the important Shiite spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah al Sistani during his visit to Iraq in 2021.

Pope Francis’s death comes during the *Jubilee of Hope* which he inaugurated on Christmas Eve last. In his acceptance of people as they are, and by his constant going out to encounter the other in their own place (see Mark 1:38 and John 12:27), he himself became the great pilgrim of hope. In his preaching and teaching he has given the Church a rich treasury from which we will be drawing sustenance long into the future. From the outset he insisted on sharing the “joy of the gospel” and put those on the periphery at the centre of his ministry. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*—the *Joy of the Gospel* (2013), established the horizon, and set out the programme for his papal ministry. The joy of the gospel, and its hope, came to shape his life and ministry, and was the centre of his teaching: “Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the gospel message, some would indoctrinate that message, turning it into dead stones to be hurled at others.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, n. 49). Witness to the acceptance, healing, and hope of Christ is what the Church is really about, and Pope Francis gave himself to it with every fibre of his being.

His life is marked by numerous profound changes. All that he became was rooted in his deep prayer, in his trust in the journey of Jesus, and in his abandonment of himself to the will of God. He has now set out on the final stage of his pilgrimage to God. For him, death “will allow us to participate, with sublime emotion, in the infinite and blissful exuberance of God’s creative act, whose endless adventures we will experience first-hand.” (24 August 2022) At the end of almost every audience and address, he would assure those present of his prayers, and ask them—with great simplicity—to pray for him. As we give thanks for the extraordinary gift he was and is for us all, let us do the one thing he asked for himself, let us pray for him. Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord. May he hear those words addressed to the good and faithful servants, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. May Pope Francis rest in the peace of Christ.