

# Pope Francis, Trailblazing Jesuit with a Heart for the Poor, dies at 88

*Gerry O'Connell, Vatican correspondent of America, the Jesuit magazine*



When the cardinals voted to elect Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the 265th successor of St. Peter on the evening of March 13, 2013, few of them imagined what kind of pope he would be. They surprised the world by electing the first Latin American and first-ever Jesuit pope. But the 76-year-old archbishop of Buenos Aires surprised them in even bigger ways from the moment of his election by choosing a name no previous pope had dared to take—Francis. He continued to surprise them right up to the very end of his 13-year pontificate.

His death on April 21, 2025, concluded a momentous and at times turbulent papacy that both supporters and detractors of the pontiff would agree has changed the church in significant ways.

“At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the home of the Father. His entire life was dedicated to the service of the Lord and of his Church,” Cardinal Kevin Farrell, the Vatican camerlengo, said in an announcement Monday.

“He taught us to live the values of the Gospel with faithfulness, courage, and universal love, especially for the poorest and most marginalized.”

Bells tolled in church towers across Rome after the announcement.

Francis, who suffered from chronic respiratory problems in recent years and had part of one lung removed as a young man, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb. 14, 2025, for a respiratory crisis that developed into double pneumonia. He spent 38 days there, the longest hospitalization of his 12-year papacy.

On the night of his election, the world quickly discovered that Francis was not only a spiritual, humble man, but he was also an inspiring leader with a fearlessness that had been forged during the years of military dictatorship in his homeland of Argentina.

His first public appearance on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica soon after his election revealed that he possessed a sense of humour and a gift for communicating by word and deed in ways that reached people's hearts. No pope in recorded history had bowed down before the crowd in St. Peter's Square and asked them to pray to God to bless him before he imparted his first blessing to them.

Elected after the historic resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, Francis invited people during that first appearance to pray for his predecessor and spoke to him by phone immediately afterward. It was the start of a unique relationship between the Argentinian-born bishop of Rome and his German predecessor that has no precedent in the 2,000-year history of the church. The relationship survived until Benedict's death,

notwithstanding determined but failed efforts by those who opposed Francis to bring Benedict XVI onto their bandwagon.

At the time of the conclave, Francis was widely recognized as the leader of the Latin American church, following the central role he played at the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) held at Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007.

With Francis, the rich theological vision that had developed in Latin America in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and had found its richest expression in the final Aparecida document now came to centre stage on the See of Peter, offering a whole new missionary vision from the Global South to the worldwide Catholic Church. He presented the church as a pilgrim people that goes out to the peripheries, both geographical and existential, a field hospital that works for reconciliation and healing, a community that promotes peace and solidarity.

### *Dismantling the Papal Court*

From the moment he took office, Francis astounded Vatican officials as he began to dispense with the trappings of worldly power and status that had been features of the papal court for centuries. He refused the gold cross and ring and the papal mozzetta, the short cape previous popes had worn. On his first morning as pope, he insisted on riding in a small economy car, not the papal limousine, and without police escort to the Basilica of St. Mary Major pray before the revered icon of Our Lady, Protectress of the Roman People. Afterward, he went to pay his bill at the Vatican residence for clergy where he had resided before the conclave.

Weeks later he made the shocking announcement that, unlike his predecessors in the 20th century, he would not reside in the papal apartment of the apostolic palace but would remain instead in a small three-room suite in Santa Marta, the Vatican guesthouse where the cardinals had sojourned during the conclave.

On his first Sunday as pope, greeting the vast crowd in St. Peter's Square and a global audience following on television and social media, Francis introduced a central theme of his pontificate: God's mercy. He had first experienced this mercy in a quasi-mystical way at the age of 17 when he went to confession in a church in Buenos Aires and saw himself as a sinner to whom God showed mercy like Jesus had shown to Matthew, the tax collector—*Miserando atque eligendo* ("Mercifully, he chose him"). He chose those same words for his episcopal and papal coat of arms.

On the second anniversary of his election, Francis announced an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Breaking with eight centuries of tradition, he opened the Jubilee in the cathedral of Bangui, the capital of the war-torn Central African Republic, on Nov. 29, 2015.

His insistence on mercy throughout his pontificate and his call to priests to always be merciful in the confessional drew opposition from some bishops, priests and others in the church who viewed morality, especially in sexual matters, in black-and-white terms.

The opposition went public at the two-part Synod on the Family (2014-15) over discussions about the pastoral approach to persons in irregular situations in terms of church law. It became even more intense in some quarters after the publication of "Amoris Laetitia," his 2016 post-synodal exhortation that suggested a path for Catholics who had remarried after a divorce to receive Communion under certain circumstances. This led five cardinals to publicly demand that he responds to their "dubia," or questions on the issue of Communion for the divorced and remarried, but Francis refused to answer questions framed in a "yes" or "no" format.

### *The World's Parish Priest*

While ever conscious of his authority as pope, Francis considered himself first and foremost as "the world's parish priest," as he confided to me soon after his election when I visited him in his apartment at Santa Marta. He was always a pastor at heart and remained so to the end. He revealed this in myriad ways as pope by reaching out with tenderness and compassion to persons grieving or in great difficulty. He invited many to come to talk with him; he contacted others by phone or with a handwritten note. The

world still knows little of Francis' pastoral ministry from Santa Marta, and his accompaniment of countless people over these years. I experienced this in the way he accompanied my own family.

Pope Francis was an inspiring preacher. His homilies, deeply rooted in the Gospels and always centred on Jesus, were spiritual masterpieces, accessible not only to the learned but to those with little or no education. He brought the Gospels to life and constantly encouraged people to read them.

In accordance with the phrase often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, he believed in preaching the Gospel "by actions and, if necessary, by words." Thus, for example, he embraced a man whose face was disfigured from neurofibromatosis in St. Peter's Square in November 2013. Another iconic instance of this was his standing alone in a rain-drenched St. Peter's Square on March 27, 2020, pleading with God to save humanity from Covid-19.

Francis was the son of Italian immigrants and, not surprisingly, he was ever attentive to the plight of migrants. By the time of his election, involuntary migration had become the most serious humanitarian crisis since World War II. He sought ways to alert the world to this unfolding tragedy and used his first trip outside the Vatican to visit the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, on July 8, 2013. There, denouncing "the globalization of indifference," he threw a wreath into the Mediterranean Sea in memory of the thousands of migrants who had drowned in it on the perilous journey from North Africa to Europe.

Throughout his pontificate, he pleaded with governments, including multiple U.S. administrations, to respond with generosity and humanity to the refugees and migrants knocking on their doors.

In the same vein, he continued what he had been doing as archbishop in Buenos Aires: combating human trafficking. He sought to alert governments and public opinion to this "crime against humanity."

### *The Poor at the Centre*

Before the conclave, most cardinals knew Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as a man deeply committed to the poor who frequented the shantytowns of Buenos Aires. When he met the international press on March 16, 2013, he revealed that he had chosen the name Francis after the Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes whispered in his ear as the votes were being counted, "Do not forget the poor." He told the press, "How I would like a church which is poor and for the poor!"

For Francis, the poor are "at the heart of the Gospel," and throughout his pontificate, he affirmed this by deed and word. He transformed the hitherto quasi-invisible office of papal almoner into a creative, daring expression of his concern for the poor by appointing a Polish monsignor, Konrad Krajewski, whom he later made cardinal, to head that office. He encouraged him to find ways to assist the needy around St. Peter's and had him install showers for the poor under the arcades in St. Peter's Square and provide medical services for them.

To ensure that the poor would remain at the centre of the church's attention, Francis established the World Day of the Poor on Nov. 20, 2016, and decreed that henceforth it be celebrated every year in Catholic churches worldwide.

Francis linked "the cry of the poor" to "the cry of creation" as evidenced by the dramatic effects of climate change. He gave powerful expression to this in his historic and widely acclaimed encyclical "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home." The document was published on June 18, 2015, the eve of the United Nations-sponsored Paris Conference on Climate Change (COP21) and is recognized as having influenced several delegations. Seven years later, on Oct. 4, 2023, on the eve of another U.N. conference on climate change, COP28 in Dubai, he issued a follow-up document to that encyclical, in the form of an apostolic exhortation called "Laudate Deum."

Advocating for the poor, Francis called for a new type of economics, one that puts the human person, not profit, at the centre. His trenchant criticism of capitalism caused some to denounce him as a communist or Marxist, but that did not deter him; he repeatedly insisted that he was simply proclaiming the church's social doctrine.

## *Seeking Conversion*

Francis was an outsider to the Vatican when elected pope. He had never studied in Rome, and as archbishop of Buenos Aires, he visited the Vatican only when strictly necessary, even after being made a cardinal. His inclusive, nonjudgmental pastoral ministry in the Argentine capital, including baptizing children born out of wedlock, demonstrated his willingness to prioritize those on the margins over the propriety that might be expected of a high-ranking prelate.

Like Pope John Paul II, he had an inherent distrust of the Vatican. John Paul II approached the Vatican bureaucracy by placing people he trusted, often Polish clerics, in every office of the Roman Curia. Francis, instead, created a council of nine cardinal advisors from all continents, to advise him on the reform of the Roman Curia and the governance of the universal church. But he also sought advice from people outside the Vatican whom he trusted, as well as from the Society of Jesus. In the end, he made the decisions himself, after much prayer and discernment.

He tended to micro-manage. He always kept his cards close to his chest, so much so that at times not even the top-ranking Roman Curia officials knew what was happening until he made his decision public. The process by which he named new cardinals is a case in point.

He tended to manage his own communications and gave some 200 face-to-face interviews. (The first of these, given to a consortium of Jesuit journals, was published in America in 2013. America published another interview with Pope Francis in 2022.) Not infrequently, his communications department learned about the interviews after they were done. His press conferences during return flights from foreign countries were spontaneous and open-ended. His freewheeling way of communicating was not infrequently a cause of much concern in the Vatican, with some bishops saying his style created confusion. He wrote four encyclicals in 12 years, the first of which was the completion of a text already partly written by Benedict XVI, *"Lumen Fidei"* (June 2013). The other three were *"Laudato Si'"* (2015), *"Fratelli Tutti"* (2020) and *"Dilexit Nos"* (2024). He also wrote seven apostolic exhortations: *"Evangelii Gaudium"* (2013), *"Amoris Laetitia"* (2016), *"Gaudete et Exultate"* (2018), *"Christus Vivit"* (2019), *"Querida Amazonia"* (2020), *"Laudate Deum"* (2023) and *"C'est la Confiance"* (2023).

Francis had clear ideas when he was elected pope; he was not navigating in a fog. This became clear when he published his first apostolic exhortation, *"The Joy of the Gospel"* (*"Evangelii Gaudium"*) on Nov. 24, 2013, a text he had written by early August. It was the programmatic document for his pontificate, aimed at propelling the church into missionary mode.

In it, he advocated a "conversion" throughout the whole church, starting with the papacy. He sought to promote the culture of encounter, not culture wars. He worked to change the culture of the Roman Curia before changing its structures, to ensure that it is at the service of both the pope and the bishops. He sought to decentralize decision-making in many areas from the Roman Curia to the diocesan bishops, most significantly in cases of marriage annulments.

Did he succeed in this work of conversion? Only time will tell. He viewed his role as starting processes that he hoped his successors would develop and bring to fruition.

## *Implementing Vatican II*

As a young Jesuit, Jorge Bergoglio was deeply inspired by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. As Jesuit provincial, he endorsed the efforts of the Latin American bishops' conferences to implement that council through the CELAM assemblies, starting with Medellin in 1968. As pope, he felt the need for a greater effort at the fuller implementation of that historic council, hence his creative commitment to ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and the liturgical renewal implemented after Vatican II. His decision in recent years to restrict the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy has to be seen in this light. He took that decision after consulting the world's bishops, many of whom saw attachment to and efforts to expand the usage of the Tridentine liturgy as part of a wider attempt to rollback Vatican II reforms.

In the same light, he recalled that Pope Paul VI had established the synod of bishops as a permanent institution in September 1965 in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive its spirit of collegiality. As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had attended several synods and saw the weakness of the existing way of functioning.

As pope, he introduced major changes in the synodal process, and in the last years, he worked with determination to build a synodal church. He believed that “synodality” is the way forward for the Catholic Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and envisaged it also as a fundamental step toward attaining unity with other Christian churches. He therefore launched a global synodal process in October 2021, starting at the local diocesan levels, then proceeding to the continental levels, and concluding with two world synods in the Vatican in 2023 and 2024, where for the first time laypeople—including women—participated in unprecedented numbers and, most significantly, with the right to vote.

### *Reform of the Curia and Vatican Finances*

The cardinals at the 2013 pre-conclave meetings had asked that the new pope reform the Roman Curia and clean up the Vatican finances that had become a source of scandal and an impediment to preaching the Gospel. As pope, Francis considered this a top priority and began by inviting international financial consultancy groups to study the situation. He established the Secretariat of the Economy in February 2014 and appointed Cardinal George Pell as its first prefect. The Australian cardinal made considerable headway in the face of strong internal opposition but had to leave his post in July 2017 to return to his homeland to stand trial on allegations of historical sexual abuse of minors.

When the cardinal’s term of office ended, Francis appointed a Spanish Jesuit, the Rev. Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, as the secretariat’s second prefect, on Nov. 14, 2019. Francis supported his push for reform by approving legislation that covered all aspects of Vatican finances, to ensure transparency and accountability. He decreed the transfer of all funds from the Secretariat of State to the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See in the wake of a scandal that saw the Secretariat of State purchase an upmarket property in London with money from Peter’s Pence. When Father Guerrero resigned, the pope appointed the Jesuit’s right-hand man, a Spanish layman, Dr. Maximino Caballero Ledo, as the new prefect.

### *Reform of the Roman Curia*

The reform of Vatican finances was only one part of Francis’ wider reform of the Roman Curia. This was only the fourth time in the past 500 years that any pope had enacted such a reform. The new constitution for the Roman Curia, *“Praedicate Evangelium”* (*“Preach the Gospel”*), promulgated by Pope Francis on March 19, 2022, established “evangelization” as the top priority of the Roman Curia and listed the Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples as the supreme dicastery. This upended the centuries-old tradition according to which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office) had been the “supreme” congregation.

Significantly, it separated the power of governance from orders, thereby opening up the possibility of appointing non-bishops, including lay men and women, to senior positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. By Feb. 17, 2025, breaking with tradition, Francis had already appointed a woman as prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and another woman as governor of the Vatican City State. Earlier he had appointed two laymen as prefects of Vatican dicasteries.

### *Affirming the Role of Women*

Throughout his pontificate, Francis sought to promote and affirm women in the life of the church and especially in the Vatican. Besides appointing women to top executive posts, he also named two women as secretaries of Pontifical Commissions, and several as members of the congregations (boards) of various dicasteries, including doctrine of the faith and bishops.

He advocated for the education of girls and the promotion of women to roles of responsibility in both church and society. He pleaded for the protection of women from violence and human trafficking. By March 1, 2024, Francis had opened the ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist to women. The question of the ordination of women to the diaconate came up repeatedly during his papacy, including extensive conversations during the Synod on Synodality. While Pope Francis said “no” to the women’s diaconate in a 2024 interview, he later approved and adopted into his own magisterium the synod’s final report, which said that the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry “remains open.” On multiple occasions, he affirmed John Paul II’s teaching that the church does not have the authority to ordain women as priests.

### *The Second-Most-Travelled Pope*

Francis was the second-most-travelled pope in history. By Dec. 31, 2025, he had made 47 foreign trips and visited 67 countries. Perhaps his most memorable trip, made in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, was to war-torn Iraq in March 2021, to give hope to its long-suffering people. Like the first Jesuits, Francis looked especially to Asia, where two-thirds of humanity lives, as a priority for evangelization. By Sept. 30, 2024, he had made six journeys to Asia, visiting South Korea (2014), Sri Lanka and the Philippines (2015), Myanmar and Bangladesh (2017), Thailand and Japan (2019), Kazakhstan (2022), Mongolia (2023), and Indonesia, Timor Leste and Singapore (2024), when he also visited Papua New Guinea.

Francis made five journeys to Africa, visiting 10 countries, three of them conflict-ridden: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan in a historic ecumenical visit with the archbishop of Canterbury and the moderator of the Church of Scotland.

He went to the Holy Land in May 2014, visiting Jordan, Palestine and Israel, accompanied by two friends, a rabbi and a Muslim leader from Buenos Aires. He also visited Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

He journeyed to the American continent eight times, visiting 12 countries, but he did not return home to Argentina. He strongly supported peace efforts in Colombia and Venezuela and helped the rapprochement between Cuba and the United States.

### *Provisional Agreement with China*

Most significantly, perhaps, and notwithstanding opposition from within church circles and from the political world, including from the United States, Francis made history by reaching a provisional accord with the People’s Republic of China in September 2018 on the nomination of bishops in mainland China, something John Paul II and Benedict XVI had wanted but failed to achieve. According to that secret accord, renewed in October 2020, 2022 and 2024, the pope would have the last word on episcopal nominations. As a result of this, for the first time since 1957 (when Beijing started ordinations without papal approval), all the Catholic bishops in mainland China are now in communion with the pope.

While far from an ideal agreement, Vatican officials said it was the best they could get at that time to prevent Beijing from appointing bishops independently of Rome in the more than 40 dioceses that were then without a pastor in mainland China. Nevertheless, the agreement left many important questions unresolved, including the fate of the underground church communities and their pastors. On the positive side, it opened a dialogue with the world’s emerging superpower.

### *Seeking Peace*

From the beginning of his pontificate, Francis sought to promote peace in countries at war, starting with Syria, and including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. As conflicts multiplied, he said the world was witnessing a Third World War being waged “piecemeal,” which risked becoming a full-scale world war with the threat of the use of nuclear arms.

He spoke out strongly against the war in Ukraine and appointed a special envoy, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, to work for the release of prisoners and the return of children abducted by Russia, and to try to foster a

climate for peace negotiations. He repeatedly called for a cease-fire in the Israeli-Palestinian war in Gaza, the release of hostages held by Hamas and the provision of humanitarian aid. He warned that war could never guarantee peace in the Holy land and advocated a two-state solution. Even during his final hospital stay, he continued his regular communication with Palestinians sheltering in a parish church in Gaza.

### *Ecumenical Outreach*

In a historical breakthrough on the ecumenical front, Francis became the first bishop of Rome ever to meet a Russian Orthodox patriarch of Moscow. He met Patriarch Kirill at José Martí International Airport in Havana, Cuba, on Feb. 12, 2016. Their relationship was put on pause by Kirill's support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

Pope Francis developed a deep, personal relationship with Bartholomew I, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, the first among equals among the leaders of the Orthodox Church. They met several times, and Francis invited Bartholomew to contribute to the writing of the encyclical on the environment, *"Laudato Si'."*

Francis also enhanced relations with the Protestant churches by attending the opening ceremony for the commemoration for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, at Lund, Sweden, on Oct. 31, 2016.

### *Interreligious Initiatives*

During his papacy, Francis developed an extraordinarily close relationship with the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, the most influential figure for Sunni Muslims, who count for 85 percent of the world's Muslims. In an act without precedent in Christian-Muslim relations, Pope Francis and the grand imam jointly wrote the groundbreaking "Document on Human Fraternity," which they signed and presented to the world at an event in Abu Dhabi, hosted by the United Arab Emirates on Feb. 4, 2019. He was the first pope to visit the Arabian Peninsula and to celebrate Mass there.

He visited other Muslim countries, including Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population.

### *Combating the Abuse Crisis*

Throughout his papacy, Francis sought to address the abuse of minors by priests. The scandal emerged first in 1985 in the United States when John Paul II was pope, but in the first decade of the 21st century, it was revealed to be a global problem that undermined the credibility of the church and its evangelization effort. Benedict XVI struggled to address it, even as he committed to meeting victims and introduced important legislation to deal with the crisis.

When he became pope, Francis, notwithstanding missteps, moved with determination to eradicate the triple forms of abuse in the church relating to conscience, power and sex, which he discerned as having deep roots in clericalism.

In December 2013, he established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which included laywomen and men, and survivors of abuse, and appointed Boston's Cardinal Séan O'Malley as its president. On June 4, 2016, he issued the *motu proprio* *"Come una madre amorevole"* (*"As a loving mother"*), which holds bishops accountable for failing to protect children and vulnerable adults and envisages their removal from office for not doing so.

In July 2018, in another decision without precedent, Francis demanded the resignation of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick from the College of Cardinals for sexually abusing a minor. On Feb. 16, 2019, he confirmed Mr. McCarrick's dismissal from the clerical state. He then authorized the investigation of Mr. McCarrick's case and subsequently approved the publication of the McCarrick Report.

In February 2019, Francis convened a summit in the Vatican of the presidents of all the Catholic bishops' conferences and heads of religious orders to focus on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons and agree on further steps to be taken. The summit underlined the need for responsibility, accountability and transparency in this field.

## *Opening to the L.G.B.T. Community*

Francis broke new ground too in relations with the L.G.B.T. community, starting with his remark on the flight from Rio de Janeiro in July 2013; when asked about a Vatican official alleged to have engaged in homosexual behaviour, he concluded his response saying, “If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?” As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had reached out to L.G.B.T. people, and he continued doing so as pope.

He supported the legal recognition of gay unions, but always distinguished it from marriage, which, in accordance with church teaching, he affirmed is only between a man and a woman. He approved a declaration allowing some blessings of persons in irregular marital situations, including same-sex couples, “*Fiducia Supplicans*,” issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on Dec. 18, 2023, which created much controversy in the church, with many African bishops opposing it, as did some prelates of Eastern churches in union with Rome.

## *Francis Encounters Opposition*

Every pope in the 20th and 21st centuries encountered opposition, but Francis faced it in a historically unprecedented way because of its dissemination through social media, blogs and popular television shows, including some Catholic media. They criticized his stance on the economy and climate change, his rejection of the culture wars, his refusal to prioritize abortion above other moral issues and his openness to those in irregular marital situations as well as L.G.B.T. persons. They objected to his teaching the death penalty is “inadmissible” and his restrictions on the Tridentine Latin Mass. Although the opposition to him was relatively small and mainly confined to the United States and some European countries, his detractors had powerful megaphones.

Like every pope, Francis chose with great care the cardinals who would one day elect his successor. He created many cardinals from the Global South, making the College of Cardinals more international, less European. By Dec. 8, 2024, he had created some 78 percent of the cardinals who can vote in the next conclave, in the hope that they would elect a pope who can continue his legacy and further the synodal church.

One cannot conclude this obituary without recognizing that from the beginning to the end of his pontificate, Francis was ever a Jesuit, the first Jesuit pope. During his early life, he delved deep into the springs of Ignatian spirituality, and this greatly enriched and influenced his thinking and writing and his governance of the Roman Curia and the Catholic church worldwide. He had met Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in Santa Fe, Argentina, in late 1965, soon after Father Arrupe’s election as father general of the Society and was greatly inspired by him. As pope, he prayed at Arrupe’s tomb in the church of the Gesù in Rome, and visited the rooms where St. Ignatius spent the last period of his life.

Francis celebrated Mass in that same church on Sept. 27, 2014, on the 200th anniversary of the restoration of the Society, and in his homily, he recalled that “The ship of the Society has been tossed about by the waves and there’s nothing to be surprised at in this. Even the barque of Peter can be tossed about today. The night and the powers of darkness are always close. It’s tiring to row.” He called on his brother Jesuits, “Let us row together!”

Pope Francis asked to be buried in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, close to the revered ancient icon of Our Lady, Protectress of the Roman People, an image to which the Jesuit order has been particularly devoted from its beginning. As a cardinal Pope Francis used to pray there on his visits to Rome before becoming pope, and where he went to pray more than 100 times during his pontificate, including before and after his foreign trips. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that the first Jesuit pope will be laid to rest in this basilica, where St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, celebrated his first Mass as a priest on Christmas night, 1538, and where Francis so often prayed.