

April 28, 2025 The Funeral of Pope Francis



The last time the body of a deceased pope was carried in procession through Rome was in 1903, when Pope Leo XIII's coffin was taken from St. Peter's Square to the Basilica of St. John Lateran, where he had asked to be buried.

That route recalled the "Via Papalis," Latin for papal way, which popes traveled in the Middle Ages when they went from St. Peter's Basilica, where they were consecrated, to St. John Lateran, to take possession of the papal palace. From the 4th to the 14th century, the Lateran was the main seat of the papacy, and today it is the cathedral church of Rome and the official ecclesiastical seat of the bishop of Rome — the pope.

On Saturday, the vehicle carrying Pope Francis' coffin detoured in the direction of the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where Francis wanted to be buried. The Vatican said on Saturday that the car was a converted pemobile that had been used in a previous trip.

People lined the streets along the way. The route passed the Chiesa del Gesu, the mother church of the Society of Jesus, the religious order to which Francis belonged. It also passed the Colosseum, the 2,000-year-old Roman arena where a 17th-century fresco that was restored three years ago showed that it had also been a sacred site for Christian worship.



The readings translation used in the Funeral Mass, provided by the BBC, are not from the New American Bible used in the United States.

The Bible readings that Pope Francis chose for his funeral Mass on Saturday speak volumes about the priorities of his leadership, with each of the three passages highlighting a different aspect of his pastoral vision.

And in what appeared to be a conscious nod to continuity and tradition, the same three passages were also read at the funeral in 2005 of Pope John Paul II, a colossal figure in 20th-century papal history.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles 10: 34-43, is part of a pivotal moment in the early church when Peter, one of Jesus' disciples and a man whom Catholics consider the first bishop of Rome, learns through a vision that the good news of the Gospel message is not just for the original followers but for a wider world.

"This is the universality of the gospel and a welcome to all," said Gemma Simmonds, an author and senior research fellow at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge, England.

"That is very much what Pope Francis wanted to emphasize," added Ms. Simmonds, who is also a sister in the Congregation of Jesus, a Catholic religious order for women. "He was constantly talking about going beyond the conventional boundaries of the church and speaking to people that the church had originally excluded."

The second reading, from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, 3:20-4:1, argues that a Christian's true citizenship is not on Earth but in heaven. The passage explains death as a transformation of the human body, which it calls the "lowly body," through Jesus, into what Paul calls the "heavenly body."

The Gospel reading, John 21: 15-19, recounts a conversation between Jesus and Peter after Jesus' resurrection, in which the disciple is restored to faith and given the leadership role in the early church. Three times in the passage, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. Jesus also asks Peter to "tend my sheep" and "feed my lambs."

According to the biblical account, the conversation takes place after Peter betrayed Jesus in the run-up to his crucifixion by denying that he knew him. Experts said that in choosing that Gospel reading, Francis — as he had during his ministry — was making a deliberate reference to human vulnerability and the need for God's grace.

“I see all of these readings as a traditional affirmation of the Christian message of forgiveness and hope and affirmation and the messages that Pope Francis emphasized in his papacy,” said Tina Beattie, a professor emerita of Catholic Studies at the University of Roehampton in London.

NYT

First Reading Acts of the Apostles 10:34-43

In those days: Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all - you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and caused him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Second Reading Philippians 3:20 - 4:1

Brothers and sisters, our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Gospel John 21:15 -19

When Jesus had revealed himself to his disciples and they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'

He said to him a second time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'

He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)

And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

The homily below was delivered by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, dean of the College of Cardinals, who presided over the funeral Mass for Pope Francis.

In this majestic Saint Peter's Square, where Pope Francis celebrated the Eucharist so many times and presided over great gatherings over the past twelve years, we are gathered with sad hearts in prayer around his mortal remains. Yet, we are sustained by the certainty of faith, which assures us that human existence does not end in the tomb, but in the Father's house, in a life of happiness that will know no end.

On behalf of the College of Cardinals, I cordially thank all of you for your presence. With deep emotion, I extend respectful greetings and heartfelt thanks to the Heads of State, Heads of Government and Official Delegations who have come from many countries to express their affection, veneration and esteem for our late Holy Father.

The outpouring of affection that we have witnessed in recent days following his passing from this earth into eternity tells us how much the profound pontificate of Pope Francis touched minds and hearts.

The final image we have of him, which will remain etched in our memory, is that of last Sunday, Easter Sunday, when Pope Francis, despite his serious health problems, wanted to give us his blessing from the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica. He then came down to this Square to greet the large crowd gathered for the Easter Mass while riding in the open-top Popemobile.

With our prayers, we now entrust the soul of our beloved Pontiff to God, that he may grant him eternal happiness in the bright and glorious gaze of his immense love.

We are enlightened and guided by the passage of the Gospel, in which the very voice of Christ resounded, asking the first of the Apostles: "Peter, do you love me more than these?" Peter's answer was prompt and sincere: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!" Jesus then entrusted him with the great mission: "Feed my sheep." This will be the constant task of Peter and his successors, a service of love in the footsteps of Christ, our Master and Lord, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

Despite his frailty and suffering towards the end, Pope Francis chose to follow this path of self-giving until the last day of his earthly life. He followed in the footsteps of his Lord, the Good Shepherd, who loved his sheep to the point of giving his life for them. And he did so with strength and serenity, close to his flock, the Church of God, mindful of the words of Jesus quoted by the Apostle Paul: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

When Cardinal Bergoglio was elected by the Conclave on March 13, 2013 to succeed Pope Benedict XVI, he already had many years of experience in religious life in the Society of Jesus and, above all, was enriched by twenty-one years of pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, first as Auxiliary, then as Coadjutor and, above all, as Archbishop.

The decision to take the name Francis immediately appeared to indicate the pastoral plan and style on which he wanted to base his pontificate, seeking inspiration from the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi.

He maintained his temperament and form of pastoral leadership, and through his resolute personality, immediately made his mark on the governance of the Church. He established direct contact with individuals and peoples, eager to be close to everyone, with a marked attention to those in difficulty, giving himself without measure, especially to the marginalized, the least among us. He was a Pope among the people, with an open heart towards everyone. He was also a Pope attentive to the signs of the times and what the Holy Spirit was awakening in the Church.

With his characteristic vocabulary and language, rich in images and metaphors, he always sought to shed light on the problems of our time with the wisdom of the Gospel. He did so by offering a response guided by the light of faith and encouraging us to live as Christians amid the challenges and contradictions in recent years, which he loved to describe as an “epochal change.”

He had great spontaneity and an informal way of addressing everyone, even those far from the Church.

Rich in human warmth and deeply sensitive to today’s challenges, Pope Francis truly shared the anxieties, sufferings and hopes of this time of globalization. He gave of himself by comforting and encouraging us with a message capable of reaching people’s hearts in a direct and immediate way.

His charisma of welcome and listening, combined with a manner of behavior in keeping with today’s sensitivities, touched hearts and sought to reawaken moral and spiritual sensibilities.

Evangelization was the guiding principle of his pontificate. With a clear missionary vision, he spread the joy of the Gospel, which was the title of his first Apostolic Exhortation, “*Evangelii gaudium*.” It is a joy that fills the hearts of all those who entrust themselves to God with confidence and hope.

The guiding thread of his mission was also the conviction that the Church is a home for all, a home with its doors always open. He often used the image of the Church as a “field hospital” after a battle in which many were wounded; a Church determined to take care of the problems of people and the great anxieties that tear the contemporary world apart; a Church capable of bending down to every person, regardless of their beliefs or condition, and healing their wounds.

His gestures and exhortations in favour of refugees and displaced persons are countless. His insistence on working on behalf of the poor was constant.

It is significant that Pope Francis’ first journey was to Lampedusa, an island that symbolises the tragedy of emigration, with thousands of people drowning at sea. In the same vein was his trip to Lesbos, together with the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Athens, as well as the celebration of a Mass on the border between Mexico and the United States during his journey to Mexico.

Of his 47 arduous Apostolic Journeys, the one to Iraq in 2021, defying every risk, will remain particularly memorable. That difficult Apostolic Journey was a balm on the open wounds of the Iraqi people, who had suffered so much from the inhuman actions of ISIS. It was also an important trip for interreligious dialogue, another significant dimension of his pastoral work. With his 2024 Apostolic Journey to four countries in Asia-Oceania, the Pope reached “the most peripheral periphery of the world.”

Pope Francis always placed the Gospel of mercy at the center, repeatedly emphasizing that God never tires of forgiving us. He always forgives, whatever the situation might be of the person who asks for forgiveness and returns to the right path.

He called for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in order to highlight that mercy is “the heart of the Gospel.”

Mercy and the joy of the Gospel are two key words for Pope Francis.

In contrast to what he called “the culture of waste,” he spoke of the culture of encounter and solidarity. The theme of fraternity ran through his entire pontificate with vibrant tones. In his Encyclical Letter “*Fratelli tutti*,” he wanted to revive a worldwide aspiration to fraternity, because we are all children of the same Father who is in heaven. He often forcefully reminded us that we all belong to the same human family.

In 2019, during his trip to the United Arab Emirates, Pope Francis signed “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” recalling the common fatherhood of God.

Addressing men and women throughout the world, in his Encyclical Letter “Laudato si” he drew attention to our duties and shared responsibility for our common home, stating, “No one is saved alone.”

Faced with the raging wars of recent years, with their inhuman horrors and countless deaths and destruction, Pope Francis incessantly raised his voice imploring peace and calling for reason and honest negotiation to find possible solutions. War, he said, results in the death of people and the destruction of homes, hospitals and schools. War always leaves the world worse than it was before: it is always a painful and tragic defeat for everyone.

“Build bridges, not walls” was an exhortation he repeated many times, and his service of faith as Successor of the Apostle Peter always was linked to the service of humanity in all its dimensions. Spiritually united with all of Christianity, we are here in large numbers to pray for Pope Francis, that God may welcome him into the immensity of his love.

Pope Francis used to conclude his speeches and meetings by saying, “Do not forget to pray for me.”

Dear Pope Francis, we now ask you to pray for us. May you bless the Church, bless Rome, and bless the whole world from heaven as you did last Sunday from the balcony of this Basilica in a final embrace with all the people of God, but also embrace humanity that seeks the truth with a sincere heart and holds high the torch of hope.