

Remembering Pope Francis

We have been joining in sorrow and prayer with the Church around the world at the death of Pope Francis. God called the Holy Father to himself in the Easter Octave, indeed the very day after the proclamation of Christ's Resurrection – the Pope's own final message to the world on Easter Sunday, even though others had to speak the words on his behalf.

It is difficult to sum up his pontificate briefly. First, his major teaching documents, in particular, his four Encyclicals: *Lumen fidei*, 'On Faith' (2013); *Laudato si'* 'On Care for our Common Home' (2015); *Fratelli tutti* 'On Fraternity and Social Friendship' (2020); and *Dilexit nos* 'On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ' (2024).

Also of a high level of authority are his seven Apostolic Exhortations: *Evangelii Gaudium*, 'On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World' (2013); *Amoris laetitia*, 'Post-Synodal Exhortation on love in the family' (2016); *Gaudete et exsultate*, 'On the call to holiness in today's world' (2018); *Christus vivit*, 'Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People' (2019); *Querida Amazonia* (2020), the Exhortation that followed the Synod on the Amazon; *Laudate Deum*, 'On the climate crisis' (2023); and *C'est la confiance*, 'On confidence in the merciful love of God' (2023) – for the 150th anniversary of the birth of St Thérèse.

There were also many Apostolic Letters. Some were on matters of governance, but of the teaching documents we can mention *Admirabile signum*, 'On the meaning and importance of the Nativity Scene' (2019); *Aperuit illis* (2019), instituting the 'Sunday of the Word of God' that we now mark every year – here in Australia in early February; *Antiquum ministerium* (2021), instituting the Ministry of Catechist; *Desiderio desideravi*, 'On the liturgical formation of the People of God' (2022); *Patris corde*, for the Year of St Joseph; and letters marking the 16th centenary of the death of St Jerome; the 7th centenary of the death of Dante; the 4th centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales; and the 4th centenary of the birth of Blaise Pascal.

We see much more breadth here than the narrow range of topics often concentrated on by various commentators. Over these years we looked a few times at this or that controversy that came up, and will not go through those again. Other controversies did not involve magisterial teachings at all, but were from off-the-cuff comments, interviews or similar. Interesting enough, and they had their impact, but the key point is that since they were non-magisterial, they have nothing directly to do with our *faith*. As with his predecessors, Pope Francis had no intention of binding the faithful to obedience when making the various comments.

The relevant things for our life of faith are the actual magisterial documents. As is often the case with the teachings of the Church and of Scripture, sometimes there is a bit of work to be done showing how it all fits together – that is normal. But as we found in all cases we looked at, careful examination finds no contradiction of past teachings. Indeed, in the numerous teachings that came out under Pope Francis' authority, we find *re-affirmations* of almost all the doctrines considered 'controversial' in the present day.

I have mentioned before the spiritual pointlessness of our delving into the *prudence* of various papal decisions, whether of Pope Francis or of his predecessors. Again, these questions of prudence are not really to do with our faith, which relates to the *truth* of Church teachings. And Catholic Faith stands today exactly where it did in 2013, exactly where it did in 1962 when the Second Vatican Council opened, exactly where it was when public revelation closed at the death of the last Apostle. There have obviously been countless *developments* – more depth and detailed

understanding of what we already believe, different emphases and angles; and that will continue till the end of time. But no development will ever *contradict* what the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has already definitively laid down.

Pope Francis canonised 942 new saints. This did include the 813 Martyrs of Otranto in Italy – put to death for their faith when the Ottoman Turks occupied the city in 1480, and beatified back in 1771. Other groups of martyrs canonised were the 30 Martyrs of Natal; the 11 Martyrs of Damascus; and the 16 Martyrs of Compiègne – the Carmelite nuns guillotined in the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution.

Among the individual saints canonised we can mention St Angela of Foligno; St Peter Faber; St John XXIII; St John Paul II; St Junípero Serra; Sts Louis & Zélie Martin (parents of St Thérèse); St Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa); St Elizabeth of the Trinity; Sts Francisco & Jacinta Marto (seers of Fatima); St Paul VI; St Óscar Romero; St Margaret of Castello; St John Henry Newman; St Titus Brandsma; St Charles de Foucauld; and St Giovanni Battista Scalabrini. Pope Francis named two new Doctors of the Church – St Gregory of Narek and St Irenaeus of Lyon – bringing the total number of Doctors to 37.

He made Apostolic Journeys to some 66 countries, including for the World Youth Days in Rio de Janeiro, Kraków, Panama City and Lisbon.

Then there were his various spiritual initiatives. In 2014 he instituted ‘24 Hours for the Lord’ annually inviting churches around the world to set aside 24 hours of Eucharistic adoration. In 2015 we had the Year of Consecrated Life; in 2016 the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy; in 2021 the Year of St Joseph; and of course, we are still in the Jubilee of the Year 2025.

Finally, we can highlight the heartfelt devotion he had to our Blessed Mother, a devotion he constantly promoted. We think of his request shortly after his election that his pontificate be consecrated to Our Lady of Fatima, as was carried out by the Portuguese Bishops on 13 May 2013; his consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 13 October 2013; and on 25 March 2022, the renewed consecration he made of Russia, Ukraine and the world to the Immaculate Heart, in union with all the Bishops – once again fulfilling the requests of Our Lady of Fatima, as St John Paul had done. In 2018 he decreed the annual liturgical celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. Just in these last several months, with the new rules for the discernment of apparitions brought out a year ago by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, quite a number of Marian apparitions and messages have received the ‘nihil obstat’ of the Holy See, under Pope Francis’ guidance and with his approval.

Prominent in his pontificate were his numerous visits to the Papal Basilica of St Mary Major and the venerable Marian image there, *Salus Populi Romani*, before and after all his Apostolic Journeys. During Covid, the image was brought to St Peter’s on 27 March 2020 for his extraordinary message and blessing *Urbi et Orbi* – delivered dramatically to an empty St Peter’s Square, but broadcast around the world. And in accordance with his *Testament*, he has now been buried in St Mary Major near that same image.

Pope Francis has now reached the destination of his own pilgrimage of hope. We entrust him once again to the mercy of God that he always proclaimed so strongly, and to the prayers of our Mother Mary, whose devoted son he always remained.