

Homily
Memorial Mass for Pope Francis
April 30, 2025

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” Dear brothers and sisters, we come together today to remember and pray for our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has gone home to the Father. Our hearts are sad, because we have lost a beloved father, the one whom our Lord placed at the head of our family, our household of faith. As the Pope who appointed me as your bishop, I felt a special closeness to him and to his mission. But in addition to our feeling of loss, we are also grateful for the gift that Pope Francis was to the Church over the twelve years of his pontificate.

Very soon after he was elected, Pope Francis called the entire Church to a renewed spirit of mission. He invited us to live according to the “Joy of the Gospel,” the title of perhaps the most significant teaching document of his pontificate. The Holy Father urged each of us, clergy, religious, and laity, to live out our baptismal calling to be missionary disciples. We are disciples, followers of Jesus, and we strive to live that discipleship, that relationship with Jesus every day, in every dimension of our lives. But we aren’t disciples who keep this relationship to ourselves. We don’t close in on ourselves, we go out to the world with the gift of his love. We are missionaries, we are sent by Jesus, to carry the joy of the Gospel to others. By the way we live our Christian faith, we become witnesses to others of the joy that comes with being followers of Jesus. That’s not just for those in religious orders who go to the most remote parts of the world. It is for all of us, including right here in Fargo, and throughout our state of North Dakota. Pope Francis continued the call issued by his predecessors to begin a New Evangelization, a new mission to the world, impelled by the Holy Spirit. With the love of Jesus in our hearts, we are sent by him to one another.

Pope Francis obviously had a great concern for the poor, the homeless, the immigrant, and any person in need. In his home country of Argentina, he was known for his visits to the barrios, to places of poverty and hopelessness, and he reminded his people that we have a responsibility for each other. He carried that forward when he became pope, and urges all of us to reach out to those on the margins, the forgotten, the isolated, the lonely, the elderly. He recognized that poverty isn’t only material, but also spiritual. So, our care for others isn’t just about giving them a handout; it’s a communication of friendship and love, letting others know that we care and that God cares. Letting others know that Jesus is with them.

One of our Holy Father’s early initiatives was the Year of Mercy, a holy year of jubilee dedicated to renewal through the works of mercy. He said that mercy is the love of God for his people, and our works of mercy unite us to God’s mercy. Mercy isn’t something that can be earned; it is given as a gift. The Year of Mercy reminded us that we have all been receivers of this gift, this unearned outpouring of God’s mercy. And so, we must be ready to extend that same mercy to others. The doors of mercy that we established around our diocese were a tangible sign of that call to mercy, that mission to live in the mercy of the Father and to share it with others.

One of the very personal aspects of Pope Francis was his devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary. Every time he set out on an apostolic journey around the world, he would travel across town to the Basilica of St. Mary Major, where he would pray before one of the oldest icons of Mary, our Mother. He entrusted his journeys to her, and when he returned, he visited again to express his thanks for her motherly care. He saw Mary as mother to us all, and he taught us that she can always lead us more perfectly to Jesus. And now, according to his wishes, his final resting place is right there at St. Mary Major, under the loving gaze of our Blessed Mother.

There is much more that could be said, but in the end, every pope is a human being just like us, a sinner in need of repentance and forgiveness. In fact, in an early interview, a journalist asked him, “Who is Pope Francis?” And his reply was simple: “He is a sinner who has received God’s mercy.” So despite the holiness and goodness we all saw in him, we also know that he stands in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. He never tired of asking people to pray for him. In fact, he constantly called us to prayer – especially bishops – because he knew how necessary this was, how dependent we are on communion with God. So, we pray for him today, as he has prayed for us throughout his years as pope. We ask God to embrace him with mercy and forgiveness, so that he can enter into the home of our heavenly Father. And we thank God for him and for the many gifts he shared with the Church and the world. As the successor of Peter, he had a monumental mission, a huge task placed upon his shoulders. But he knew that he never carried it alone, and he joyfully counted on the divine help of Jesus his Savior.

So, as we bid farewell to Pope Francis, let us pray for him, and let us pray for the Church in these days of transition, that our Lord will continue to bless us with his grace and love, the grace and love of the Good Shepherd.