



April 21, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I received with shock and sadness the news of Pope Francis' death on this Easter Monday. At the same time, I consider it a blessing that he returned to the House of the Father during these sacred days in which we celebrate the certain triumph of Christ's Resurrection. I ask all Catholics in the Diocese of Crookston to pray intensely for the repose of the soul of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, as an expression of our filial support as members of the one family of God.

More information will be forthcoming about how we, as a diocese, will mark his passing and express our gratitude for Pope Francis' pontificate. We will soon have the opportunity to offer a diocesan Memorial Mass for him, so we can gather to pray for Pope Francis in this important moment. I ask every parish and Catholic school to offer special prayers for the repose of his soul this week. This could include a special Rosary with our schoolchildren and certainly the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be at every Mass for the repose of Pope Francis' soul. It is appropriate to offer such prayers throughout the nine days of mourning, which we will observe as a universal Church.

Pope Francis changed my life. He had a profound impact on the entire world, especially through his preaching of the joy of the Gospel and his witness to the transforming power of mercy. He will be remembered as a reforming pope who sought, in his own way, to make our Church reflect more fully the truth and simplicity of the Gospel. Pope Francis believed that mercy was the central experience of the Gospel, as we celebrated during the days of the Easter Triduum. He spoke profoundly about how the experience of mercy overwhelms and changes us, so we can be transformed into missionaries of mercy for the world.

Pope Francis also firmly believed that every Christian is called to be a missionary. He popularized the phrase *missionary disciples* and called all of us, in our own way, to be witnesses to the life-changing power of knowing Jesus as Lord. He believed that the Good News of Jesus must be shared with the world. We have taken his words to heart in the Diocese of Crookston, as we have begun working toward our own pastoral vision — seeking to turn all our parishes into mission centers and inviting every Catholic to become a missionary.

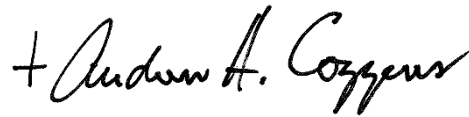
My own life was deeply impacted by Pope Francis on October 1, 2013, and October 11, 2013, when he named me an auxiliary bishop. During the six occasions I had the opportunity to meet him, I was deeply moved by his love and personal attention. During the ad limina visit of the bishops of our region in January 2020, the fifteen of us spent two and a half hours with him. I experienced him as a man of deep faith and love for the Gospel and the Church.

The last time I saw Pope Francis in person was in June 2023, when I asked him to bless the monstrance and the chalice for the 10th National Eucharistic Congress. I, along with many of the organizers and benefactors of the Congress, had a private audience with him. He spoke beautifully about his desire that many graces would flow to the whole Church in the United States. God truly answered his prayer. That chalice he blessed, I was privileged to use at our Chrism Mass just last week in the Diocese of Crookston.

Let us continue to pray for the repose of the soul of our Holy Father. We will have more details soon about how we, as a diocese, will remember him. Let us also pray for the Cardinals of the Church as they gather both to mourn Pope Francis and to elect a new pope. May the Holy Spirit guide and protect our Church in these days.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. Amen.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Andrew H. Cozzens". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Andrew H. Cozzens, S.T.D., D.D.
Bishop of Crookston