In memoriam: Francis, the Pope of the Peripheries

“It is with deep sorrow that I must announce the death of our Holy Father Francis. **At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the Father’s House**. His whole life has been dedicated to the service of the Lord and his Church”. With these words Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell announced to the world the death of Francis on Easter Monday 21 April.

On the day of his election as the 266th successor of Peter, more than 12 years ago, on 13 March 2013, his first words were: “**You know that the duty of the conclave was to give a bishop to Rome. It seems that my brother cardinals have gone to look for him almost at the end of the world**”.

Before entering the conclave, at 76 years of age, he was aware of his imminent retirement, and that he would soon become archbishop emeritus. For some time, he had already booked room 13 of the Monsignor Mariano Espinosa Priests’ Home in the Flores neighbourhood, the same where he was born and raised, and his return ticket was scheduled for 23 March, the eve of Holy Week. Undoubtedly, his plans for the last stage of his life pointed to his native Buenos Aires, 11,345 kilometres from Rome, in the Southern Cone of Latin America … at the “end of the world”.

But God’s ways are mysterious. Bergoglio was elected Pope on the fifth ballot of the conclave. At that moment Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes embraced him and whispered: “don’t forget the poor”. When asked what name he would adopt, he replied: “I will call myself Francis”. He was the first Latin American Pope, the first Jesuit and the first to adopt the name Francis in honour of St Francis of Assisi, the servant of the poor who advocated a return to its origins: “**a poor Church for the poor**”, **as Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Pope of the peripheries, also wanted it.**

His origins

The son of a family of Italian immigrants, Jorge Mario was the eldest of five children born to Mario Bergoglio and Regina Sívori. He was born in Buenos Aires on 17 December 1936. Eight days later, on 24 December, he was baptised in the

Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Almagro.

His grandmother Rosa was a woman of “deep faith and political aptitude”, as journalist Austen Ivereigh recalls. She had even taken part in Italian Catholic Action in the 1920s. She also taught him to love literature.

From a young age, he was interested in studying. He spent his days reading, but this did not limit his passion for football and for his team: San Lorenzo, the most modest of the Buenos Aires teams, founded in 1907 by the Salesian priest Lorenzo Massa.

Jesuit vocation

After graduating as a Chemical Engineer, he **entered the diocesan seminary of Villa Devoto, and on 11 March 1958, the novitiate of the Society of Jesus**. During his first years as a Jesuit, he completed his studies in the Humanities – which included Classical Sciences, History, Literature, Latin and Greek – in Santiago de Chile.

Then, after returning to Argentina, he graduated in Philosophy in 1963, and between 1964 and 1966 he taught at the Colegio de la Inmaculada in Santa Fe, where he also **met the great writer Jorge Luis Borges**, who in 1965 facilitated a seminar at the school on “Martín Fierro and gaucho literature”.

From 1967 to 1970 he earned a Degree in Theology at the Colegio Máximo de San José, where he was a disciple of the Jesuit Juan Carlos Scannone (1931-2019), one of the great exponents of the ‘**theology of the people**’ that had such an influence on his pastoral physiognomy.

He was ordained to the priesthood on 13 December 1969 and between 1970 and 1971 he was sent by his superiors to Alcalá de Henares (Spain) where he underwent his ‘third probation’ to become a Jesuit.

On his return to his country he was appointed Novice Master (1972-1973), a responsibility which he alternated with teaching in the Theological Faculty, among other services.

At that time, he **was elected provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina, a responsibility he assumed between 1973 and 1979**, coinciding with the time of the harsh dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla. Those were very difficult years,

which he faced with a spirit of discernment and on the side of the most vulnerable.

From 1980 he was entrusted with new responsibilities in the Society of Jesus, as rector of the Colegio Máximo de San Miguel (1980-1986), which included the faculties of theology and philosophy, while also serving as parish priest of San Miguel.

In 1986 he was sent to Germany to finalise details of his dissertation, and on his return, he was assigned to other tasks before his arrival in the city of Cordoba, where he was spiritual director and confessor between 1990 and 1992. During those years he wrote several works: ***Meditations for Religious*** **(1982),** ***Reflections on the Apostolic Life*** **(1986) and** ***Reflections of Hope*** **(1992).**

Shepherd with the "smell of sheep"

On 20 May 1992, John Paul II appointed him auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. His episcopal ordination took place on 27 June at the hands of Cardinal Antonio Quarracino. **The motto he chose as bishop would also inspire his pontificate:** ***Miserando atque eligendo*** **("he looked at him with mercy and chose him").**

Bergoglio succeeded Quarracino in the pastoral government of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires from 28 February 1998, becoming also Archbishop Primate of Argentina and Grand Chancellor of the Catholic University of Argentina. Then, **on 21 February 2001, Pope John Paul II created him a cardinal.**

His role in the Argentinean and Latin American Church did not go unnoticed. His leadership as Chair of the Argentine Episcopal Conference for two consecutive terms, between 2005 and 2011, and as Chair of the drafting committee of the Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, which took place in 2007 in the city of Aparecida (Brazil), was very significant. **The** ***Document of Aparecida*** **would be foundational and inspirational in his Magisterium as pontiff.**

As a shepherd with the 'smell of sheep', he was well acquainted with the great challenges facing the Church. Before his election as successor of Peter, **Cardinal Bergoglio served in various bodies of the Roman Curia**, such as the Congregations for the Clergy, for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

He was also a member of the Pontifical Council for the Family and the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. He had also been general rapporteur of the 2001 Synod of Bishops, which reflected on the mission of bishops, and had taken part in the conclave of 2005, when Benedict XVI was elected successor to John Paul II.

The Pope of the Peripheries

The pope of the 'end of the world' has also been the Pope of the peripheries. From his first gestures, when he renounced the luxurious Papal Palace and decided to live in the House of Santa Marta. Or when he **marked the beginning of his pontificate by travelling to the island of Lampedusa, in southern Italy, to show solidarity with the victims of the Mediterranean** and to champion, from that moment on, policies of welcome and integration in favour of migrants.

Francis was the Shepherd 'with the smell of sheep' who risked everything to deliver the Catholic Church to the geographical and existential frontiers where life cries out. "I prefer a Church that is bruised, wounded and stained by going out into the streets, rather than a Church sickened by confinement and the comfort of clinging to its own securities", he said in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he set out the 'programmatic plan' of his pontificate.

He was **the Pontiff of Mercy** who for more than a decade insisted time and again that the Church should be "poor for the poor", a "field hospital" to heal people's wounds, a Church open to all, without distinction.

As Bishop of Rome, **he was committed to fraternity and social friendship, as he endorsed in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (2020)**, and called for an end to wars through dialogue, because for him "every war is a defeat".

He was the Pope who vehemently denounced socio-environmental crime and **advocated for the care of Creation in his encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015)**, and the need to implement multilateral actions in the face of the climate crisis, through his apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* (2023). He also set his sights on the Amazon, dedicating an extraordinary Synod "for a Church with an Amazonian face and heart" in 2019.

He was the Pontiff who upheld hope in times of pandemic and reminded world leaders that **"one does not come out of a crisis the same way: one either comes out better or worse"**.

He was the spiritual leader who **took up the scourge of abuse in the Church without delay**, listening to the victims and asking for forgiveness.

He was also the Pope who spared no effort to maintain unity and communion among Catholics, and who **led the Church along the paths of synodality, from communion, take part and mission.**

And he was also the Pope of Hope, who **encouraged us to live the Jubilee Year 2025 as Pilgrims of Hope, because "hope does not disappoint"**, it is "the anchor of the soul". *Hope* is the title of his autobiography, published earlier this year, as a living memory of his enduring legacy.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools thank the Lord for the gift of Pope Francis' life to society, the Church and the Lasallian Family. Shine his light forever! Rest in peace, Pope Francis!

To honour the memory of Pope Francis, we are sharing the message he left to all Lasallians at Christmas 2023.