

Franciscus: a project of life, church and integral ecology

On the morning of April 21, 2025, we received the sad news of the death of our beloved Pope Francis. He passed away in Rome at 7:35 a.m. local time, at the age of 88. In recent months, he had been struggling with his health limitations, without losing his lucidity and good humor. Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a Jesuit from Buenos Aires, Argentina, was elected Pope on March 13, 2013, and served as Roman Pontiff for 12 years. A Latin American Pope who defended a new humanism, in the face of so many wounds that affect especially the poorest. A Pope who pushed the Church in its missionary vocation, being synodal towards the peripheries. A Pope who placed integral ecology as a fundamental element for the survival of life and the human species on planet Earth. A Pope who won the hearts of the People of God, of people of all religions, including those without religion. A pope who has aroused opposition from people and organizations that promote hatred, wars and destroy the environment.

He left us on Easter Monday. In many situations during the Easter season, we heard the Word of God testifying to the new life in Christ. In the Gospel of the liturgy on the day of the death of our beloved Francis, we heard the resurrected Christ saying, before the women who had left his tomb: “Rejoice, do not be afraid...” (Mt 28:9-11). Faced with this manifestation of the Resurrected Christ, we are called to reaffirm our belief in the resurrection, in the life that comes from Him, the Living. Looking at the very structure of the universe, of creation, we can see a grammar of transformations that generate the planets, living beings, and so many creatures. In everything, life emerges as a sacred miracle, a gift from God, which has a Christ mark, which has gained transparency in the new life inaugurated by Him, our Redeemer.

Jesus, the Son of God, revealed that all that we experience in our lives and in nature, in a limited way, are signs that point us to something greater: the glory of God. He, who, in his earthly existence, spent his life doing good, was crucified by the evil of worldly powers, overcame death, inaugurated the Kingdom of peace and justice, the reign of the commandment of love, and revealed the divine government over everything and everyone. And, as a new humanity, he showed us that our destiny is eternal life, the

paradise that will come in fullness, which is already present through the mystery of his resurrection. What joy it is to feel this grace that comes from the Lord, who, as he did with those women, also encourages us to live love in times of so many challenges.

In this Easter atmosphere, surrounded by the Jubilee of Hope, the Lord of Life welcomed our beloved Pope Francis. His prophetic legacy was a clear manifestation of someone who lived surrounded by this Christian Easter reality. In so many situations, Francis was a foretaste of heavenly glory amidst the wounds of our current civilization. Let us think of the name Francis, chosen by Him, a clear option for simplicity and commitment to the poorest. He bore witness to this above all through his closeness to people, washing the feet of prisoners, embracing refugees, condemning prejudices against homosexuals, being merciful, etc. More than words, his actions were strong and broke down barriers. He fought against the privilege of Catholic hierarchies, demanded administrative transparency in the Vatican, and was firm in confronting serious abuse of minors. All of this shows how he justified, in his daily life, why he chose to be called Francis.

We would like to highlight what he left us in his main documents. At the beginning of his teaching, he published the Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel. This text encouraged the Church to be a Church that goes out to the existential and geographical peripheries, with dynamic synodality. It reestablished its missionary zeal as a community that proclaims the joy of the Gospel, especially in the company of those discarded by human greed. Ten years ago, in 2015, he gave us a great and bold gift: *Laudato Si*, on care for our common home. This encyclical is certainly his greatest innovation and has inexhaustible contributions for our times. In it, the Holy Father stated that we are going through a serious socio-environmental crisis, which has human roots, due to an economy of death, of extractivism that does not respect creation. And he made his innovative proposal, which is: “Integral Ecology.” Everything is interconnected on planet Earth and that is why we must experience a profound ecological conversion, starting by opting for happy sobriety, aiming to take our place as guardians of creation and not as destroyers of it. In 2024, he wrote *Laudate Deum*, a text that explicitly criticizes the technocratic paradigm. He raised his voice against an economy based on accumulation and a development model that never reaches the poorest. In 2024, he wrote *Laudate Deum*, a text that explicitly criticizes the

technocratic paradigm. He raised his voice against an economy based on accumulation and a development model that never reaches the poorest. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, he published *Fratelli Tutti*, on Universal Brotherhood. A document that condemns war and the death penalty, and proposes the fight for a culture of encounter. A civilization capable of welcoming migrants, promoting forgiveness, overcoming all forms of hatred, and building peace.

Let us pray that, together with the Good Shepherd Jesus, Francis will intercede with God for the Church he loved so much. So that, especially in these days, a time of new choices, it may continue its prophetic work, being a poor Church, of the poor, that knows how to combat a global system of death, imposed by the greed of a privileged minority. And do not give up choosing those chosen by Jesus to walk with them, the poor, the sick, climate refugees, etc. Caring, more and more, for creation that suffers from so many attacks by destructive economic powers. We know that these days of grief are also a time for choosing the new pope. There is speculation, which is normal. We are a diverse Church, present on five continents. However, what we most desire is that there will be no setbacks resulting from anachronistic conservatism. In fact, we hope that the future successor of Peter will be able to advance even further in areas that expect a more prophetic response from us. Thinking about the Church, there is an urgent need for ministerial renewal, including the issue of married priests, women's ministries, welcoming new forms of family, greater closeness to young people, and a simpler Church, on pilgrimage in defense of those discarded by history. Looking at the world, at a time when we are going through a serious socio-environmental crisis, we long for a Church that is ever more protective of our common home. Against capitalism that has put human life and the planet at serious risk. I would like finish my contribution with Francis own words “May the Lord grant a fitting reward to all those who have loved me and who continue to pray for me. The suffering that has marked the final part of my life, I offer to the Lord, for peace in the world and for fraternity among peoples”.

Dom Vicente de Paula Ferreira

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