



HIS HOPE WILL NOT DIE!

My Tribute to Pope Francis

Mario J. Paredes

For the Catholic Church to be, infallibly and unfailingly, the community of believers and disciples of Jesus Christ, it must be adjusted in accord and harmony with the Gospel of the carpenter's son of Nazareth, his Good News, i.e., with his words and criteria. This is the only way believers in a faith community can be the "light and salt" of the earth.

Pope Francis has died, and this, precisely, was his main work, legacy, and what he will be remembered for by posterity in the Church and in the history of humanity: to have tried – in season and out – to bring the lives of Catholics and all humankind closer to the Gospel's principles and values. He fought to build a kinder world, one that is more just, humane, supportive, and fraternal.

He carried out this endeavor throughout his life as a man and Christian, and especially as he conducted his Petrine ministry, with the profound certainty that flows from the life of Jesus of Nazareth: that all human beings have the dignity of being children of the same God, the good Father and Creator, and this is why we are all brothers and sisters, sharing solidarity today – in good and evil – and a common destiny.

This evangelical conviction shaped the whole life of the porteño from Argentina, a descendant of Italian immigrants. It shaped the man, the chemist, the Jesuit priest, and the Pope, whom I had the privilege of being a disciple of in Buenos Aires.

Still shocked by the news and with deep regret, I write these lines as a tribute full of affection to someone who— thanks to life and on many occasions – I had the honor of getting to know personally and enjoying his friendship and teachings. In recent years, for example, in two private audiences, the Holy Father received more than 1,100 doctors from the SOMOS COMMUNITY CARE Organization I work for and he encouraged us to launch the *Thank you, Doctor!* campaign which mission is to humanize healthcare, specially for the most vulnerable. These encounters today are indelible in the history of our institution. At the same time, this is a tribute of gratitude that, together with the whole Church and all humanity, we very deservedly owe and pay to the much-loved Pope Francis.

I believe that I echo the simultaneous sadness and joy that many are experiencing right now. We experience sadness for the departure of such an illustrious human being, an exemplary Christian, and a good shepherd. We also experience joy because we are left with his testimony, his example of life, and a path of humanity and holiness, open for us to follow in search of better times for Catholicity and the whole world.

The Petrine ministry of Francis always came with an eagerness to label him, to assign him as a man on the right or the left, as a conservative or a reformer, etc. Javier Cercas, in his recently published book, “The Madman of God at the End of the World,” the result of accompanying Pope Francis on his trip to Mongolia, addresses this eagerness to label him by saying that – as in every human being – there were, in Francis, many Bergoglios in a single Bergoglio.

But here I would like to say that the young and the elderly Jorge Mario, the chemist, and Pope Bergoglio, the student and the priest Bergoglio, the porteño and the Roman Bergoglio, all the possible Bergoglios, shared this in common: a sense of humility and simplicity, an unbeatable faith, a sense of humor that both saves and springs from the joy of knowing that one is loved by God, a universal love manifested in his openness and generous dedication to all people, but especially to the “discarded” of society, fidelity to the Gospel and, therefore, authenticity as a disciple of Christ, his freedom and courage to defend the truth, his ecumenical spirit and his Franciscan care for the “common home.”

Amidst all of this, in a world needing authority, leaders, and men and women with coherence between what they say and do, preach and practice, between what they believe and live, in a Church contaminated by these shortages in authenticity and truths, Pope Francis, through all his gestures and words, emerged as a great reformer, a renovator, whose shepherding and legacy leaves us all to witness his hope for a better Church and world.

But he, who asked young people to “make a mess,” caused trouble within the Church. Due to the various aspects of Francis' personality, religious experience, and ministry, he garnered adversaries who, being accustomed to traditions, privileges, and power, perceived Francis as a threat. Francis invited them to build a poor Church of and for the poor, to go out to the peripheries (not only the geographical ones), to make the Church a great tent to heal wounds, to smell of sheep, etc.

For this reason, like Jesus himself at the table of the Last Supper, Francis knew suffering, the product of the incomprehension of his people, and the sorrow that came with weathering the storm that the sexual abuse scandal involving clerics has meant for the Church in recent decades. And it is he who faithfully follows the Gospel and the Truth that is Jesus Christ himself, who finds himself – like Him – facing persecutions and the cross, a sign of authenticity in discipleship.

Francisco has left us. We have lost the physical presence of a great Christian man, an authentic leader, and a pastor. We are left with his invitation to build a Church and world where hope, through mercy, is possible. We are left with the memory of his madness, the same as that of Jesus of Nazareth, whom “they said was crazy” for swimming against the world’s current and living and inviting us to follow God’s logic and not the world’s.

After the funeral services, the conclave of cardinals will take place to elect Francis’ successor in the See of Peter. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the electors and that, as a result, the legacy of the good Pope Francis will be preserved, embodied in his countless pastoral trips, meetings, audiences (public and private), books, homilies, exhortations, documents, encyclicals, etc.

Thank you, Francis!

*Rest in the peace that comes from one's eternal presence in the Father's
love!*

Mario J. Paredes is the secretary of the Dr. Ramon Tallaj Foundation. The Dr. Ramón Tallaj Foundation is a non-profit institution that grants scholarships to low-income students with high academic performance who wish to study a career in the health field.