

Pope Francis RIP

1936 - 2025

IT IS with great sadness that I heard of the passing of Pope Francis this Easter Week. Having been appointed Bishop of Killaloe by him in 2016 I had the opportunity to meet him soon after that, during the course for new bishops in Rome. I met him again for the occasion of the Ad Limina visit of the Irish Bishops in January 2017 and of course during his visit to Ireland for World Meeting of Families in 2018.

Even though he didn't have much English he exuded warmth, friendliness, and genuine interest in people he met. It was humbling to hear him on each occasion to ask for prayers for him personally as he exercised his mission.

He was a man who understood and appreciated the power of image, gesture and sound bite and through that he rapidly became a household face across the globe.

We are so familiar with his smile, washing and kissing the feet of prisoners on Holy Thursday, posing for a selfie with a young girl in Croke Park, encouraging clergy to 'smell of the sheep' to get out among the flock and praying devoutly before the Icon of Our Lady in St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome before and after he embarked on all his pastoral visits.

He rejected the trappings of glamour and opulence. His refusal to move into the papal apartment, dined with others in the canteen in the Casa Santa Martha, wore scuffed leather shoes, a simple pectoral cross, went down the street in Rome to have his spectacles repaired and remained a normal human being as much as he could in this prominent role, always under the spotlight of the world media.



Since his appointment as Holy Father in 2013 he has had a profound impact on the whole world as a spiritual leader and humble pastor. From the simple greeting, moments after his appointment along with his warm smile and asking people to pray for him he won over the hearts of so many. This was matched with a quiet and steely determination to embark on a mission of gentle reform in the Church.

One of the many traditional names for the Holy Father is Pontifex Maximus, Supreme Bridge Builder and Pope Francis

certainly endeavoured to be that with all determination, personal charisma and pastoral skill.

In choosing the name Francis, we got a strong indication that his papacy would be one of preferential option for the poor, the marginalised and those in trouble of any kind. His enthusiasm and missionary spirit was revealed in his first big communication, The Joy of the Gospel. He was on fire with a missionary zeal and encouraged others in that regard always.

The fact that he chose to have an extraordinary jubilee year of

Mercy soon after set the tone revealing his image of God. It was little wonder following on from that that he chose hope as the theme for the scheduled jubilee, this year. I am honoured this year to be the Irish Bishop's nominee to be delegate, encouraging the celebration of the Year of Hope.

Since it began with the opening of the Holy Door by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve last I have seen the positive way people have engaged with the great virtue of hope in the diocese and beyond and the great consolation it has given. The last major publication

of the Pontif, his was entitled just that; Hope: The Autobiography. The mark of the man!

A deeply prayerful and spiritual man Pope Francis had a great devotion to Our Lady, popularising the devotion to Our Lady, Untier of Knots, to St Joseph, the devotion to The Sleeping St Joseph and also the Sacred Heart, his last encyclical being Dilexit Nos, He Loved us on the Human and the Divine Love at the Heart of Jesus Christ!

Care for the environment, migrants, emigrants, refugees, safeguarding children, tirelessly promoting peace, ecumenism, interfaith dialogue and the synodal way of being Church were to the foremost of his agenda during the fruitful papacy of Francis. One of his often used words was 'encounter', encouraging people to genuinely encounter each other and moreover encountering the Lord in prayer.

His spiritual and pastoral legacy is immense, and he will be sadly missed. There is something poignant and special in the timing of the passing of the Holy Father, Easter Monday morning, just after the Universal Church celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Pope Francis made his last public appearance on the balcony in the Vatican for the traditional Urbi et Orbi blessing. Buona Pasqua - Happy Easter were the final words of a faithful pastor to his flock, a man who truly did 'smell of the sheep' until the very end.

May he rest in peace! The light of heaven to his noble soul. Sympathies and condolences to all who mourn his loss.

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