



A PASTORAL LETTER

On the death of Pope Francis – “Please, pray for me”

To be read at all Masses on Divine Mercy Sunday

27th April 2025

My dear brothers and sisters,

On this Sunday of Divine Mercy, we commend the soul of Pope Francis into the arms of God’s mercy. Anyone who met Pope Francis during his twelve years as our Holy Father will have heard him make an insistent plea: *“Please, pray for me!”* I had always prayed for the Pope, yet Pope Francis impressed on me with those urgent words the need to always pray for the man called to be Peter’s Successorⁱ. In the hour of death, it is always our first duty of charity to pray for the souls of our loved ones departed. This Sunday we must pray for the soul of the man who became Pope Francis for us.

Today we share many memories of Pope Francis. We might think of the *Year of Mercy* he called in 2015 which saw many return to sacramental confession. We might picture in 2020 a deserted Saint Peter’s Square at the height of the global pandemic, when Pope Francis stood alone holding the Blessed Sacrament in blessing to the world. We might recall his last (Encyclical) Letter to the Church urging the renewal of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.ⁱⁱ It may be less well remembered that on every apostolic journey Pope Francis went first and returned to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. It is in this ancient church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, that his mortal remains have been laid to rest as an abiding testimony to his love and devotion to Our Lady.

Some of us were with Pope Francis in 2019 when he declared John Henry Newman as England’s newest Saint. Newman had reflected on the long continuity of the Office of Saint Peter across the centuries, declaring that Christ’s Church remained as unchangeable as Jesus Christ her founder, for as in the Apostles’ time *“It taught the truth, so it does now; as then it had the sacraments of grace, so has it now ...”* and just as it had a visible head at the beginning, so it must now have such a head.

And Newman asked: “*Who is that visible head now? Who is now the vicar of Christ? Who now has the keys of the kingdom of heaven, as Saint Peter had then? If a successor of Saint Peter there must be, who is that successor?*” Newman insisted there could only be one conclusion: “*It is he who sits in Saint Peter’s chair: it is the Bishop of Rome ... in the continuous line of the Bishops of Rome, or Popes as they are called, one after another, down to this day*”ⁱⁱⁱ.

As Pope Francis, the 265th Successor of the Apostle Peter, now goes with all our prayers, we must pray for the Cardinals entrusted with the responsibility of choosing a new Pope. This task is undertaken not with Hollywood intrigue, but in an atmosphere of prayer and recollection, which reminds each Cardinal of the final account he must give to Our Lord. In our lifetimes, we have been blessed with remarkable men chosen to be our Pope, some numbered among the greatest Saints. They were men gifted with great minds and pastoral hearts, communicating the Gospel and the Catholic faith to all humanity with unflinching concern for souls. Yet, each man was also conscious of his weakness and limitations and asked the help of our prayers in this awesome calling. Today we must pray for the man soon to be chosen as the next successor of Peter. May he fulfil his mission to confirm us in faith and be a true shepherd for the entire flock of the Lord entrusted to his care^{iv}.

United with you in this prayer,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Acts 12:5

ⁱⁱ Dilexit Nos 24th October 2024

ⁱⁱⁱ The Pope and the Revolution, Sermon preached on 7th October 1866

^{iv} Cf. Lk. 22:32 & Jn 21:17