



After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.
Rev 7:9



Celebrating Divine Mercy: A week of hope, faith, and healing

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Kampar parish marks 350 years of Sacred Heart revelations

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Labour and dignity

May Day's global cry for justice

ROME: As the world marked International Workers' Day on May 1, two contrasting scenes played out on opposite sides of the globe.

In the city streets of Asia and the Middle East, the day unfolded in turmoil — protests, police crackdowns, and cries for justice echoed from Istanbul to Manila, Tehran to Tokyo. Workers rallied for fair wages, job security, and social protections, many facing repression, violence, or arrest.

Meanwhile, in Rome, under the banner of the Holy Year 2025, the Catholic Church opened the Jubilee of Workers (May 1–4), offering a spiritual and pastoral witness to the sacredness of labour and the enduring rights of workers.

In Turkey, thousands defied government bans to gather at Istanbul's Taksim Square, a symbol of resistance long restricted by state authorities. Riot police clashed with demonstrators, making over 400 arrests. Elsewhere in Kadıköy, Istanbul's Asian district, a government-approved rally drew thousands. The chants were clear: "Labour, peace, democracy, and justice."

In the Philippines, workers marched through central Manila, voicing alarm over global economic instability and local job insecurity. Protest leader Mong Palatino warned, "Tariff wars and the policies of Trump threaten local industries."

In Iran, teachers held peaceful protests outside the Ministry of Education, demanding better wages and reforms. The response was swift and brutal: demonstrators were



Pilgrims taking part in the pilgrimage to St Peter's Holy Door at the start of Jubilee of Workers. (Iubilaeum25 facebook)

beaten and detained. Officials, attempting to quell the unrest, admitted inflation had eroded a recently approved 45 per cent wage increase. Subsidies and food aid were promised, but dissatisfaction remained.

In Japan, demonstrators focused on the fragility of international markets, calling for gender equity, health care, and peace, especially in Gaza and Ukraine.

And in Hong Kong, May Day passed quietly for the sixth consecutive year. Public rallies have all but disappeared. A small symbolic protest by the League of Social

Democrats was quickly curtailed. "The workers' voice has been reduced to a memory," read their statement, a reflection of the city's shrinking democratic space.

In stark contrast, Rome offered a quiet counterpoint. The Jubilee of Workers, part of the Church's 2025 Jubilee of Hope, drew pilgrims, trade union leaders, and working-class families from around the world. Organised by the Dicastery for Evangelisation, the event was centred on St Joseph the Worker, patron of labourers.

The mood, however, was solemn. Fol-

lowing the death of Pope Francis on April 21 and his subsequent funeral and nine days of mourning, the Jubilee programme was scaled back.

Despite this, thousands of pilgrims gathered to perform the Jubilee rite of pilgrimage, crossing the Holy Doors of the four Papal Basilicas — a moment of renewed faith and resilience.

Pope Francis, remembered for his deep commitment to the poor and working class, once said: "Labour is not merely an economic activity — it is a reflection of our human dignity and a path to holiness."

His absence was keenly felt. But the Church's message remained clear: in a world driven by markets and profit, the worker must never be forgotten. "The economy must serve the people, not the other way around," echoed one of the homilies during the pilgrimage.

This May Day offered a striking portrait of the world of work today. In one scene, people marched under the sun, risking arrest for the right to earn a living with dignity. In another, prayers rose beneath Michelangelo's dome, invoking peace, fairness, and hope.

Both moments, though starkly different, gave voice to a common truth: the struggle for fair, meaningful, and humane work continues.

As the Jubilee of Workers concluded in Rome, and as protest dust settles across Asia and the Middle East, the question persists:

Will the world finally listen to its workers and act? **AsiaNews/Agencies**



Malaysians taking part in a rally, carried the theme 'Workers are the pillars of the country: Raise salaries, not burdens'. (EFE photo/Fazry Ismail)



Police in Istanbul arresting demonstrators during their rally. (AsiaNews)

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Each year, on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday, a day that is also marked as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. It is a day when we pause to reflect with gratitude on the gift of vocations, especially to the priesthood and religious life. In a world grappling with noise, distractions and endless options, the call to serve as shepherds of God's people is more relevant—and more urgent—than ever.

Here in Malaysia, we are blessed with priests and religious who have tirelessly given of themselves to serve the People of God. From urban cathedrals to rural chapels, from school classrooms to hospitals, and among the marginalised and migrants — our shepherds walk alongside us. Many have left behind careers, comforts and even countries, responding instead to the quiet but insistent voice of the Lord: "Follow Me."

We give thanks for their dedication, sacrifices, and unwavering faith. Often uncelebrated, their work forms the heartbeat of our parishes and missions. Especially in the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, many priests and religious went beyond their call of duty to be present to the faithful — offering online Masses, food aid, spiritual guidance and emotional support. For this, and so much more, we remain eternally grateful.

Yet today, as we honour them, we must also ask: who will take up the mantle tomorrow?

Malaysia, like many parts of the world, is witnessing a growing scarcity in vocations. Our dioceses face aging clergy and religious communities. Many parishes are served

by only one priest, some juggling several communities. The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are indeed few.

Pope Francis, who often spoke from the heart on vocations, reminded us: "The priesthood is not a profession, it is a vocation, a calling. It is a response to the loving gaze of the Lord." He cautioned against reducing the priesthood to mere function or career, emphasising that "priests are not social workers or officials. They are shepherds in the image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep."

He also urged religious men and women to live their charisms with joy and courage, saying: "The consecrated life is not about survival; it is about new life. It is a sign of joy and hope in a world that sorely needs it."

These words are not just meant for those already in ministry — they are an invitation to all of us. Parents, especially, have a crucial role. Too often, we encourage children to pursue ambitions that promise financial security or social prestige, yet overlook the nobility of a life spent in service to God and His people. Parents must keep the door open. Give your children the freedom and space to discern whether God may be calling them to something greater—something eternal.

To the young people: Do not be afraid to ask the deeper questions. The world may offer comfort and convenience, but it cannot satisfy the deepest longings of your heart. If you feel a stirring to serve, a yearning to walk with people in their joys and sorrows, a desire to bring Christ into the world in a radical way—

do not ignore it. Speak to your parish priest, your youth coordinator, a religious sister or brother. Pray. Listen. Trust.

There is no "perfect" candidate for a vocation — only hearts that are open. God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, let us recommit ourselves to praying for vocations. Parishes, schools and families must nurture a culture of discernment. We must create spaces where young people can reflect on God's call, unafraid of judgment or pressure.

The Church in Malaysia needs shepherds. We need priests to celebrate the Eucharist, forgive sins, baptise new life, anoint the suffering, and accompany us in faith. We need religious brothers and sisters to teach, serve, and witness to the Gospel in radical ways. We need missionaries of hope, joy, and compassion.

Let us not forget what Pope Francis once said: "A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people." May we be that faithful soil. May we give thanks for those who have answered the call, and encourage others to do the same.

Let us pray for more shepherds who will guide us, walk with us, and remind us always of the voice of the Good Shepherd — calling us by name, leading us to life in abundance.

Lord of the harvest, send us holy priests and religious for our Church in Malaysia. Amen.

Patricia Pereira

The voice that calls us home

There is a video on YouTube with more than one million views entitled *Do sheep only obey their Master's voice?* The video shows an experiment about a group of strangers calling out to a herd of sheep, but they don't take notice but when the shepherd started calling out his sheep, they recognise his voice and immediately comes toward him. Such a meaningful video that truly portrays our Gospel today about the Good Shepherd!

The Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday, invites us to reflect on Christ's love and care for us, his sheep. The image of the Good Shepherd which carries a sheep on his shoulder is central to understanding our relationship with Jesus and the church. In the Gospel reading from John 10:27-30, Jesus declares, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

This passage highlights the intimate connection between Christ and us, his followers. It's not just about intellectual knowledge but the deep, personal relationship of love and trust. It is intimacy that Jesus wants from us. Jesus knows each of us individually, calling us by name and leading us to eternal life. He gives us eternal life and no one can snatch us out of his hand or the father's hand emphasising the security and love found in Christ if only we allow Him. This further begs the question, What or Who is my security in life? Do I allow God to be my security? Many of us put our security on worldly things, worldly desires and worldly figures. That is why we never feel secure. I guess that is why the song *Anxiety* by DoeChii is so popular because so many of us put our security on everything else except our Creator — The Good Shepherd.

Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. This is not the act of a hired hand who flees at the first sign of danger, but of a shepherd who loves his sheep so much that he is willing to sacrifice everything for them. This sacrifice reveals the infinite mercy of God.

How can we make this image of the Good Shepherd and his flock practical in our daily lives? Here are some reflections:

1. **Recognising his voice:** How do we know it's Jesus speaking and not just our own thoughts? It's like a couple who've been together for decades, they know each other so well, they barely need words. This familiarity comes from time spent together. Likewise, to recognise Jesus' voice, we need to spend time with Him in prayer, silence, and scripture. Stillness helps us hear His gentle whisper, while meditative reading of the Gospel deepens our understanding. True intimacy with God is mutual — it takes two to tango. In our journey to recognise Christ's voice, it is essential to cultivate stillness amidst the chaos that often engulfs our daily lives. Carving out moments of silence allows us to attune our hearts to the gentle whisper of the Good Shepherd. Just as the sheep in the video discern the distinctive call of their shepherd, we too can learn to perceive the nuances of Christ's voice through a regular practice of quiet prayer and contemplation. Moreover, engaging with the Scriptures deeply enriches our understanding of His teachings and furthers our ability to recognise His voice. Through meditative reading and reflection, the words of the Gospel come alive, enabling us to internalise His guidance and promises.

2. **Following Him daily:** Following Jesus means evaluating our daily choices: Would this please Him? Simple acts of kindness, service, and forgiveness reflect His path. When we slip, return to Him with honesty and a desire to grow. This daily attentiveness keeps us close to the Shepherd.

3. **Trusting His protection:** What are you afraid of? Bring your worries to God. Let go of fear and choose to trust His love. If fear drives your decisions, ask: Has fear become my god? Pause when overwhelmed, and remember: you are held safely in the hands of the Father and the Son.

In our modern world, it is easy to become

Reflecting on our Sunday Readings with Fr Martinian Lee

4th Sunday of Easter (C)

Readings: Acts of the Apostle 13:14, 43-52;

Revelation 7:9, 14-17;

Gospel: John 10:27-30

distracted and lose sight of the voice of the Good Shepherd amidst the noise of everyday life. However, dedicating time for quiet reflection and prayer can help us reconnect with this divine guidance.

Furthermore, the community of believers plays a crucial role in nurturing our relationship with Christ. Engaging in fellowship with others who share our faith can provide support, encouragement, and accountability as we strive to follow the Shepherd's voice. Together, we can grow in understanding and faith, helping each other to recognise and respond to Jesus' call.

Embracing the image of the Good Shepherd also calls us to be shepherds to others. By showing compassion, kindness, and love to those around us, we reflect the love of Christ and become instruments of His grace. Whether through small acts of kindness or significant gestures of support, our actions can profoundly impact the lives of those we encounter.

Lastly, cultivating gratitude for the blessings we receive from the Good Shepherd can further strengthen our bond with Him. Acknowledging His providence and expressing thankfulness allows us to see the abundance of His love and care in our lives, enabling us to trust more deeply in His protection and guidance.

As we continue our journey with the Good Shepherd, let us strive to listen for His voice, follow His example, and trust in His unwavering love and protection.

Fr Martinian is the parish priest of the Church of the Holy Family, Ulu Tiram and Director of Caritas MJD



KUALA LUMPUR ARCHDIOCESE

Diary of Archbishop Julian Leow

May

- 12 Meeting – KLAPC
- 13 Feast Day – Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Brickfields
- 18 Confirmation – Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mentakab
- 20-21 Clergy Monthly Recollection



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

Diary of Bishop Bernard Paul

May

- 14 South Johor Vicariate Clergy Meeting – St Elizabeth Church, Kota Tinggi
- 17 Sunset Mass – Church of St Joseph, Plentong at 5.00pm
- 8 World Day of Prayer for Vocations Mass – St Louis Church, Kluang
- 20-21 Clergy Monthly Recollection

Perjalanan Salib launched in KL

Kristen Priya Krishnan

KUALA LUMPUR: The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur launched the *Perjalanan Salib* during the 6.00pm Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist on April 27. It was presided over by Archbishop Julian Leow, with Fr Paulino Miranda and Fr Gerard Theraviam concelebrating.

In his homily, Archbishop Julian encouraged the faithful to remain hopeful amid doubt and uncertainty, saying, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” He reflected on how doubt deepens faith and called for trust in Christ’s resurrection despite brokenness in the world.

The archbishop also highlighted Pope Francis’ concern for migrants and the marginalised, urging Catholics to be messengers of hope and compassion. The *Perjalanan Salib*, he said, promotes unity, repentance, and renewed commitment to Christ’s sacrifice, while also raising awareness about environmental care and family empowerment.

The *salib* will travel to the Catholic Mission in Terengganu and eventually visit parishes and chapels across the archdiocese. It forms part of a nationwide initiative culminating in a major convention in 2026, where nine crosses will be reassembled from Malaysia’s nine dioceses.

Archbishop Julian closed the Mass with a prayer that the faithful may journey together in faith, echoing Christ’s words, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32).



Archbishop Julian Leow blessing the congregation at the end of the Mass.



After Mass, the “Salib” was carried out in procession.

The *Perjalanan SALIB* is a national devotional pilgrimage launched by the Catholic Church in Malaysia as spiritual preparation for the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026). It was inaugurated during Malaysia Catholic Youth Day on April 3, 2025, when the nine bishops of Malaysia blessed a specially crafted cross.

Symbolising unity in diversity, the *SALIB* consists of nine interconnected nine-foot-tall wooden crosses, each representing one of the country’s dioceses, adorned with the *Bunga Raya*, Malaysia’s national flower. The flower signifies national unity, freedom, and the triumph of Christ’s love.

Over a 17-month period, each cross will travel through parishes within its respective diocese for prayer and reflection. Appointed coordinators from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia will oversee the pilgrimage at the diocesan level, reinforcing the Church’s synodal character — diverse yet united in the Holy Spirit.

In September 2026, the nine crosses will be reassembled into a single Crucifix at MPC2026, a powerful symbol of the collective prayer, hope, and faith of the Malaysian Church.



Malacca Johore Diocese News Update #221



Welcome dear friends,

Good to be back after a short break. I was away for the Feast of the Divine Mercy at the Church of the Divine Mercy, Sg Ara. Yet managed to witness the funeral of Pope Francis live.

A momentous time in history. A pope who finished strong and finished well. World leaders descended on Vatican City. Zelenskyy, Trump and Starmer met. Religious leaders with their followers dropped in to pay their respects to Pope Francis at cathedrals and diocesan centres.

The Malaysian government was represented by Dato’ Sri Azalina Othman Said and Datuk Ewon Benedick for the PM. The Pope has been buried at Basilica of St Mary Major.

Next will be the Conclave, with 135 cardinal electors. The Church awaits the successor to Pope Francis. We pray for continuity and building up the Synodal Church.

Silent Crises Can Fester. Singapore goes to the polls. Mixing politics with religion - tensions are surfacing. BN gained Air Kuning, by a lesser majority, said the loser. Malaysia seeks to maintain good ties with the US, breaking from the united ASEAN front.

Online heated debate on 14K straight As in SPM 2024. Netizens are wondering if this is a sign of skyrocketing academic excellence or lowering of grade bar. The Queen urged Malaysians not to take national harmony and unity for granted.

Doctors, the cornerstone of the nation’s health, are overburdened, undervalued and at risk of severe mental health struggles.

Prices of *roti canai*, *nasi lemak* and *satay* – some of Malaysia’s favourite foods – have almost doubled in price over the past 13 years, according to the Statistics Department. The fundamentals are often taken for granted.

A Thought for The Week: God Said No!

I asked God to take away my habit. God said, No. It is not for Me to take away, but for you to give up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. God said, No. His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience. God said, No. Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; it isn’t granted, it is learned.

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, No. I give you blessings; happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to Me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.

I asked God for all things so that I might enjoy life. God said, No. I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.

I asked God to help me LOVE others, as much as He loves me. God said... Ahhhh, finally you have the idea.

Something’s Happening Near You:

1. The Annual Conference of Permanent Deacons was held from April 30 to May 2 at Majodi Centre, attended by the deacons and their spouses.

2. The MJD prepares for the *Training of Trainers Programme on Synodality*, the changes that are expected, the conversions needed, the spirituality required to sustain this new Pentecost. Ignorance is not bliss.

3. The PSO MJD will be conducting a *Safeguarding of Minors Workshop* on July 5 (9.00am - 1.00pm) at Majodi Centre for Tamil-speaking parents, youth leaders and catechists.

4. The Catholic Bishops of Malaysia made a *nationwide appeal for Myanmar-Thailand earthquake humanitarian response* - the second collection on Divine Mercy Sunday in all churches. Additional donations are welcome till May 1.

“QnQ! Q asks? The Apostle John was imprisoned. How do the interned cope?”

Archbishop Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan had *10 Rules of Life*, when he was confined in a Vietnamese Concentration Camp. He became so effective at evangelising his jailers that the prison had to change them regularly. Van Thuan said that he was happy there, as it was God’s turn to speak and for him to listen. He also devised the following *10 Rules of Life*:

“I will live the present moment to the fullest.”

“I will discern between God and

God’s works.”

“I will hold firmly to one secret: prayer.”

“I will see in the holy Eucharist my only power.”

“I will have only one wisdom: the science of the cross.”

“I will remain faithful to my mission in the Church and for the Church as a witness of Jesus Christ.”

“I will seek the peace the world cannot give.”

“I will carry out a revolution by renewal in the Holy Spirit.”

“I will speak one language and wear one uniform: charity.”

”I will have one very special love: the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

The cause for the beatification of Cardinal Văn Thuận opened in 2007

The Holy Spirit @work: Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonise earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is about.” *Athanasius of Alexandria*

Something To Tickle You: It is this belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself which allows me to venture into the unknown and even the unknowable. *Maya Angelou*

Bernard Paul
Bishop Bernard Paul

Praying for Pope Francis

As the world mourns the passing of Pope Francis, requiem Masses were celebrated across all dioceses in Malaysia. Below is a round-up of these commemorations.

The shepherd of *Sibu* intentionally placed Papa Francis' picture next to the Jubilee Cross which will be moving throughout the Diocese of Sibu.

On April 25 at 7.30pm, one thousand people attended the memorial Mass to pray for the repose soul of Papa Francis at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

In his homily and reflection, Bishop of Sibu, Rt Rev Joseph Hii described Papa Francis as a true Witness of the Risen Lord.

"We have seen the Resurrected Lord in the life of Pope Francis. The Lord is truly risen in him."

Describing him as a man who has faithfully lived out his baptismal call, becoming a living witness to Christ's love and mercy.

He literally laboured until his last breath, giving himself fully in humble service to the Church and to all of humanity — especially the poor, the forgotten, and the

marginalised.

"As the Perjalanan Salib travels to every parish, chapel, community, home, long-house, and workplace, we now call upon him to journey with us. May his example inspire us to live the joy of the Gospel with courage, tenderness, and faith."

In the *Archdiocese of Kuching*, Bishop Simon Poh, who was appointed by Pope Francis as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kuching on March 4, 2017 (Auxiliary Bishop on July 9, 2015), held a Requiem Mass for the late Pope Francis on April 25, 2025, at 5.30pm at the Cathedral of St Joseph.

The prelate said that the death of Pope Francis is a global loss.

"Pope Francis reminds us that as priests and bishops, we are called to be shepherds who smell like the sheep, walking with the people entrusted to us with humility and



Sarawak

The congregation paying their respects to the late Pope Francis.

compassion," said Archbishop Simon.

The *Diocese of Miri* celebrated Requiem Mass for the Holy Father Francis on April 26 at 7.00 am at the Cathedral of St Joseph.

"The two outstanding characteristics of Pope Francis to me are his humility and his humanity, especially his closeness to those who are suffering," said Bishop Richard Ng.



Archbishop Julian Leow incensing the portrait of the late Pope.

The Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, Archbishop Wojciech Zaluski, joined Archbishop Julian Leow of *Kuala Lumpur* and the clergy in a Requiem Mass for Pope Francis at the Cathedral of St John on the evening of April 29.

"May the legacy and insights of the late Pope Francis, especially the spirit of fraternity, inclusivity, and synodality, continue to inspire society today," said Archbishop Julian.

In the *Diocese of Penang*, as Cardinal Sebastian Francis is in Rome, Msgr Henry

Rajoo requested all parishes to celebrate a Requiem Mass for Pope Francis to celebrate his life and entrust his soul to the loving arms of our Heavenly Father on May 1. Prior to that, many parishes did celebrate the requiem mass for the Holy Father.

In the *Diocese of Malacca Johore*, a memorial Mass for the late Holy Father, Pope Francis, was celebrated on Tuesday, April 29, at the Chapel of St James, Majodi. The 7.00am Mass was presided over by Bishop Bernard Paul and attended by many lay faithful.

Peninsular Malaysia



Bishop Bernard Paul celebrating the memorial Mass at the Chapel of St James.

Before the Mass, numerous attendees gathered to sign the Book of Condolences and offer prayers for the late pope.

In his homily, Bishop Bernard reflected on Pope Francis' enduring legacy of building bridges with people of other faiths and his leadership marked by hope and compassion for all humanity. He highlighted how Pope Francis' humility and advocacy for the poor — especially migrants — had deeply resonated not only with Catholics but also with many in the Muslim world.

The bishop also recalled the pope's sim-

licity, his tenderness toward the suffering, and his inclusive approach to sensitive issues involving the LGBTQ community and those who are divorced and remarried. He cited Pope Francis' powerful image of the Church as a "field hospital," and his call for clergy to be close to the people "to smell like the sheep."

Bishop Bernard concluded by urging the faithful to pray daily in a special way for the upcoming conclave and the election of a new pope, asking God to guide the Church through these challenging times.

Sabah

In the *Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu*, all parish priests joined Archbishop John Wong to celebrate a Requiem Mass for Pope Francis at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart on April 28 at 7.30pm.

"In our moment of sorrow, we are comforted by the thought that Pope Francis is now with the Heavenly Father who had called him to lead His Church for the past 12 years," said Archbishop John.

In the *Diocese of Keningau*, Bishop Cornelius Piong encouraged his priests to celebrate a Requiem Mass for Pope Francis at every parish.

Bishop Cornelius stated that His Holiness Pope Francis was a true inspiration to everyone. He touched every life and contributed tremendously to strengthening family, refreshing the role of the Church, community, and the care of Creation and the environment.

The prelate added, "He tirelessly pro-



The clergy paying their respect to the late Pope Francis.

moted interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding, and the shared values that unite all religious traditions and respect for the dignity of all beings."

The Bishop of *Sandakan*, Rt Rev Julius Dusin Gitom, celebrated the Requiem

Mass for the soul of Pope Francis on the evening of May 5, at the Cathedral of St Mary, Sandakan.

"As we mourn the passing of our beloved Pope Francis, pray with deep gratitude

for the goodness of a life well lived and his leadership as the shepherd of the universal Church. May the Lord grant him eternal rest in his kingdom. May God grant him eternal rest in His kingdom," he said.

Celebrating Divine Mercy: A week of hope, faith, and healing

PENANG: With devotion, hope, and enthusiasm, they walked through the main streets of Jalan Kenari, Sungai Ara, undaunted by the blazing sun as they proclaimed Jesus' mercy and bore witness to His boundless love. The Divine Mercy Sunday procession through the neighbourhood surrounding the Church of Divine Mercy marked the joyful culmination of the parish's annual Feast Day and weeklong celebrations.

Newly baptised parishioner Eric shared his experience: "Being involved for the first time as a Divine Mercy image bearer, I naturally found it heavy at first. But it made me reflect on how much heavier it must have been for Jesus to carry the weight of our sins on His shoulders. As the procession continued, it truly felt as though the Lord was carrying it with us. We were all filled with joy and felt truly blessed."

The Feast began on a gentle note with the nine-day Novena starting on Good Friday, gradually building in spiritual momentum through the joyous celebration of Easter and culminating with great fervour on Divine Mercy Sunday. On Easter Monday, the Church was struck by sorrow with the passing of its chief shepherd, the beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, a true disciple of Divine Mercy, whose death was mourned by the faithful around the world.

In honour of the late Holy Father, each day of the Divine Mercy Novena Masses included special prayers for his soul. A table bearing his image and a lit candle was placed beside the altar as a tribute to his life, legacy, and unwavering witness to Divine Mercy.

In alignment with the Universal Church's

milestone Jubilee Year theme, Pilgrims of Hope, celebrated by over a billion Catholics worldwide, the parish adopted the theme: *Divine Mercy: Inspiring Hope Against All Hope*, taken from the final verse of the Litany of Divine Praises. Throughout the week, the main celebrant, Fr Raymond Raj, expounded on daily Mass themes that reflected the core elements of the Jubilee. These included: (i) *Be Awakened: Pilgrims of Hope*, (ii) *Be Healed: Hope through Reconciliation*, (iii) *Be Nourished: Hope in the Eucharist*, (iv) *Be United: Hope in the Gospel*, and (v) *Be Other-Centred: Missionaries of Hope*.

Breaking it down, Fr Raymond shared, "The words mercy and hope are inseparable. The Feast of Divine Mercy invites us to reflect on and embrace the virtues of hope and mercy toward one another. I hope and pray that this feast has inspired the faithful to become instruments of God's love and mercy."

Throughout the week, various parish ministries organised activities based on the daily Novena intentions, helping devotees fully embrace the teachings of Divine Mercy. On Divine Mercy Monday, the congregation paused between decades of the Chaplet to pray for those yet to know God, reflecting the group whom Jesus instructed St Faustina, the "Apostle of Mercy," to bring to "His ocean of mercy."

On Tuesday, each decade of the Chaplet was prayed for those separated from the Church. Short audio clips of individuals who feel alienated, representing groups such as divorcees, LGBTQ individuals, migrants, parents of special needs children, and those with mental



The congregation touching the image of the Divine Mercy.

health challenges, were interspersed between each decade. This helped bring the plight of marginalised groups to life, making their struggles more real and relatable.

Wednesday saw many families bringing their children for a special blessing, as the church prayed for the meek and little ones. After Mass, attendees received origami hearts prepared by the Catechism classes as a token of blessing.

Devotees were also encouraged to spend time in quiet adoration at the JPPI Adoration Room and to write notes of thanksgiving in line with Thursday's intention for those who especially venerate God's mercy. A special blessing for the sick and elderly was offered at the end of Mass that day.

On Friday, the faithful gathered to remember their deceased loved ones, whose names were offered during Mass as part of the Novena intention for souls in purgatory.

The Novena concluded on the ninth day with a prayer for lukewarm souls, whom Jesus said "cause me more suffering than any other." Over the final four days of the Novena, attendees were encouraged to pray for themselves and others struggling with a lukewarm faith, urging them to reignite and make their faith vibrant and alive.

Throughout the week's Novena Masses, attendees were given special prayer cards. When collected over six days, the cards formed an image of Divine Mercy on the reverse side. Leading up to the 3.00pm Mass on Sunday, exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament were held, along with opportunities for confession, all in preparation for the grand celebration that followed.

In his inspiring weekend homilies, Bishop Bernard Paul of Malacca Johore spoke about three distinct groups of people. First, those without hope, those who have given up on life, the lost, and the aimless. Second, those with false hope, those who seek comfort in lies, half-truths, and "build on sand." Finally, he addressed those who hold fast to true hope, returning to the "written word," listening to the Holy Spirit within them, and building on a foundation of genuine hope.

He shared three ways God inspires true hope in us. First, Christ-centred communities, similar to the early Christian communities, which became beacons of hope for others. Bishop Bernard encouraged us to be like little lights, guiding those in need of hope. The second way is through the "written word." It sustains and ignites our faith and love. The third way he mentioned is "mercy encounters," powerful moments of God's presence that bring deep, freeing peace. God is merciful, gentle, and forgiving. These mercy encounters transform lives, filling individuals with new purpose. Ultimately, our only true hope is Divine Mercy, the resurrected Christ — hope that never disappoints.

Visitors from other parishes and even from different states, including a busload of pilgrims from Our Lady of Lourdes in Ipoh, joined in the feast day celebrations. Overwhelmed by the enthusiastic participation throughout the week, Parish priest, Fr Michael Raymond OFM Cap shared, "Mercy is the name and the face of God." His words perfectly captured the sense of God's abundant grace flowing freely, available for all to receive.



The congregation walking in procession.

A journey to the margins in Kampar

KAMPAR: In April, two seminarians, Bro Solomon and Bro Melvin, led a group of Catholics from Kuala Lumpur on a visit to an Orang Asli village in Batu Berangkai, Kampar. The "pilgrims of hope" group was warmly welcomed by Kak Meera, the Orang Asli Catholic leader, into her home. The visit was an opportunity for city Catholics to gain a firsthand experience and deepen their understanding of the lives of the Orang Asli, who live in sub-rural areas. It also provided a chance for fraternity and friendship to flourish.

The group brought various food items, including milk powder, canned sardines, rice, Milo, curry powder, Maggi noodles, *beehoon*, sugar, wheat flour, biscuits, and condensed milk. Kak Meera shared that these provisions would be equally distrib-

uted among the seventeen Catholic families living in three Orang Asli villages in the area and nearby. Additionally, forty educational books in English were donated to help the Orang Asli children improve their proficiency in the language.

The Church of the Sacred Heart in Kampar also supports these families by providing monthly provisions as part of their assistance. Kak Meera mentioned that the seventeen Orang Asli Catholic families in Kampar are mostly living in poverty due to their circumstances. To supplement their income, she and a few other Orang Asli handweave traditional mats, typically made from pandanus or sedge leaves, which are used as sleeping mats or floor mats. Some visitors bought a couple of these mats to support the community.



The pilgrims purchasing the traditional mats to support the Orang Asli community.

Kak Meera also provided a brief overview of the Orang Asli in this part of Perak, highlighting that they are one of the most marginalised communities in the country. According to a recent report, there are approximately 71 Orang Asli villages in Perak, with 50 per cent of their residents living in hardcore poverty.

Though the group initially planned to visit two more homes, their visit was cut short due to heavy rain. The road leading to the village is unpaved, and their bus had to park a short distance away. Despite this, the group assured Kak Meera that they hoped to return soon to visit the other Catholic families in the area. **Bernard Anthony**

A Pope for the poor

Tan Sri Bernard Dompok's tribute to Pope Francis

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's first resident ambassador to the Holy See, Tan Sri Bernard Giluk Dompok, expressed deep sorrow at the passing of Pope Francis, describing him as a fearless advocate against inequality and a beacon of compassion and justice.

"Pope Francis was a Pope for the poor, the downtrodden, and the forgotten," Dompok said. "He was close to the realities of human fragility, meeting Christians facing war, famine, persecution and poverty. Yet he never lost hope for a better world."

Recalling his audience with Pope Francis on June 9, 2021, at the Vatican, Dompok shared that he presented his letters of credence and engaged in a meaningful discussion on Malaysian economic matters. The Holy Father listened intently, showing sincere interest when told about the role of Mill Hill missionaries in the 1870s in spreading Catholicism throughout North Borneo (now Sabah), particularly in the growth of churches, mission schools, and healthcare services.

One moment that left a lasting impres-



sion on Dompok was Pope Francis' choice of residence during his pontificate. Rather than the grand Apostolic Palace, he opted for a modest room at Casa Santa Marta, a Vatican guesthouse. This act of humility, choosing to live among others rather than above them, set the tone for his papacy.

"He knelt before the world and asked the people to pray for him when he was chosen as St Peter's successor. That gesture of humility defined him," Dompok noted.

Throughout his 12-year pontificate, Pope Francis championed causes close to the margins of society. One of his hallmark

commitments was to migrants and refugees.

"I remember in 2016, during his visit to the Greek island of Lesbos, he brought 12 of the most vulnerable refugees back with him to Italy on his own plane," Dompok recalled.

His efforts extended beyond the Catholic Church. From the start of his papacy in 2013, Pope Francis reached out to the Islamic world, most notably through the historic signing of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, in the United Arab Emirates in 2019.

In his ecumenical efforts, the Holy Father consistently encouraged dialogue, unity, and collaboration among Christian denominations. He believed in walking, praying, and working together to confront the deep spiritual crisis affecting the world today.

On April 25, Dompok, together with the Apostolic Nuncio to Malaysia, attended a special morning Mass in honour of Pope Francis and signed the Book of Condolence.

"When news of Pope Francis' passing reached me, I was with my colleagues. As the Camerlengo made the solemn announcement, I sat in disbelief. We immediately stopped what we were doing and prayed for the repose of his soul. I couldn't hold back my tears, his death felt deeply personal.

I count myself blessed to have had the opportunity to meet him in a private audience — not once, but twice. The most recent was in January 2025, during the Jubilee of Communication. In both encounters, I was struck by his humility and warmth. He was an inspiring shepherd who led with compassion, and I looked up to him as a true role model of servant leadership.

His homilies and messages spoke powerfully of mercy, compassion, and unwavering faith. Many of us were touched by his

His legacy lives on through our actions

constant invitation to "listen and speak with the heart." A message that has become a guiding light in my own ministry within the Social Communications Office.

What moved me most was how he lived what he preached. In our meetings, he truly listened. He looked into my eyes as I spoke, and in that simple yet profound gesture, made me feel seen, heard, and valued. His presence was gentle, yet deeply affirming.

As we mourn his passing, we also give thanks for his life and witness. His legacy lives on, in the way we communicate, in the way we encounter others, and in the way we serve. May we continue to be inspired by his example to communicate always with truth, empathy, and love." **Daniel Roy Santiyagu**



Papa Francesco, you are home

"I never imagined that just two years after the Synod on Synodality began, Pope Francis would bid his final farewell. When I heard the news of his passing, my heart sank. I am deeply grateful and humbled to have been given the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet someone so extraordinary.

I still remember the last day of the Synod in October 2024. I approached him and said, "I will miss you, Papa," to which he gently smiled and replied, "Please pray for me." In that moment, I sensed I would never meet him again. That brief exchange, filled with tenderness, captured who he truly was — brave and prophetic, yet gentle and patient, with the heart of a servant.

"During the Synod, when some of us grew tired from the long hours, Pope Francis remained with us, quietly and faithfully. He often arrived early, without fanfare, taking time to greet and speak with delegates. His presence was constant



— almost every day, he was there with us. He may not remember me, but I will never forget him. His spirit, not just his words, is etched in my heart.

The first time I saw Pope Francis was at the Asian Youth Day in South Korea in 2015. Even from afar, his presence moved

me to tears. Then in 2023, during the opening of the Synod, I had the privilege of meeting him up close. As I stood in line, my heart pounded. When I finally reached him, I instinctively knelt. He immediately took my hand and said, "Please don't kneel," gently helping me to stand. I know he was just a human being, but in that moment, I felt the holiness and love of Christ radiate from him.

"I truly believe that from the moment he was ordained, Pope Francis never stopped praying to God the Father and to Mama Mary. His life bore witness to Christ's presence through his words, actions, and pastoral heart. Among the many messages he shared, the one that touched me most was his 2018 address to youth on World Mission Sunday. Two lines, in particular, have stayed with me:

"I am a mission on this Earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 273)

"Never think that you have nothing to offer, or that nobody needs you... Many people need you. Think about it! Each of you,

think in your heart: many people need me."

"These words became a personal call to action. My participation in the Synod — both in 2023 and 2024 — was not a coincidence. It was a mission. A mission to carry forward the spirit of synodality, to proclaim Christ's love, and to be His presence in the world. Pope Francis has left me with a legacy: to help build a Church that is "bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets," rather than one that is closed off and clinging to comfort.

"Papa Francesco, my heart aches at your departure, but I know with certainty: You are home with the Father in heaven. Thank you for the love and dedication you poured into your mission, especially throughout your 12 years as our Holy Father. Your courage and compassion went far beyond what the world expected.

"Your voice for the poor, the migrants, the wounded, and the forgotten will continue to echo in our hearts. Your witness to peace will remain our guide.

"Thank you, Papa, for being a gift and a blessing to us all.

"I don't know what the future holds, but I trust in the One who holds it and I believe Pope Francis will continue to pray for all of us from heaven." **Anna Teresa Peter Amandus**

Kampar parish marks 350 years of Sacred Heart revelations

Bernard Anthony

KAMPAR: The Church of the Sacred Heart in Kampar, established in 1908, is the oldest parish dedicated to the Sacred Heart in Peninsular Malaysia. In celebration of the 350th anniversary of the Revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St Margaret Mary Alacoque, the parish has launched a year-long effort to renew this devotion, inviting both parishioners and pilgrims to encounter the profound love of Jesus Christ.

Parish priest Fr Simon Anand shared that, in conjunction with the anniversary, the parish has welcomed various pilgrim groups to deepen their experience of God's love and mercy through the Sacred Heart. He high-

lighted Pope Francis' call to promote and pray this devotion.

Over the past four months, several pilgrim groups have visited, with more on the cards. Most recently, a group from Kuala Lumpur came for Mass, where Fr Simon reflected on the divine revelations received by St Margaret Mary between 1673 and 1675, messages that conveyed Jesus' burning love for humanity and His sorrow over indifference to that love.

Fr Simon emphasised that the devotion, passed down through St Margaret Mary, is being reawakened in the parish. The Universal Church launched the Jubilee of the Sacred Heart in December 2024, which runs until June 25, 2025, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart.



The pilgrims venerating the relics.



Fr Simon Anand anointing the pilgrims.

He also shared the parish's history, highlighting its growth and the vital role of the migrant and Orang Asli communities. Underscoring the Church's missionary nature, Fr Simon announced the arrival of three relics from the Vatican: those of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, St Maximilian Kolbe (patron of prisoners), and St Frances Xavier Cabrini (patroness of migrants).

Pilgrims venerated the relics following the Mass, and Fr Simon administered the Sacrament of the Sick. Seminarian Bro Solomon led them in a devotion and introduced the life of St Margaret Mary through a short video that explained Jesus' call for humanity to return to His Heart,

along with the twelve promises made to her.

Also present were Fr Innas from Indonesia and seminarian Bro Melvin. Fr Simon urged families to consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart. The event continued with a vegetarian lunch, fellowship with the Orang Asli community, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Pilgrims concluded the day by exploring the church's Gothic architecture and visiting a nearby Orang Asli village.

Deeply moved, pilgrims left inspired to live the spirituality of the Sacred Heart through first Friday devotions, family consecrations, and prayer, drawing closer to the Heart that loves us all.

Segamat church's charity effort for Canossian students

SEGAMAT: The Post Centennial Committee of the Church of St Philip, located in Segamat, Johor, organised a charity walk entitled "Give Hope and Spread Love" to commemorate the conclusion of the church's centennial celebration. The primary objective of this event was to support B40 students attending the Canossian Convent of Segamat, which is managed by the Sisters.

Currently, the Canossian Sisters in Segamat are accepting B40 students into their convent, offering a range of benefits to facilitate their educational endeavours.

The event began at approximately 6.30am with participant registration. Each attendee paid an entry fee of RM50, which covered a T-shirt, a goodie bag, a bottle of mineral water, a thank-you card, and bread.

A total of 100 participants engaged in the event, with attendees travelling from diverse locations, including the United States, as well as from Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan, in addition to Singapore. After a brief warm-up session, Fr Paul Wong delivered a welcoming address and offered a blessing for the participants' safety during the



The participants of the charity walk

walk. He subsequently inaugurated the 3.5-kilometre walk around Segamat town by lighting firecrackers.

Participants were excited and experienced a significant level of enthusiasm, as this was the inaugural event of its kind organised by the church.

The weather was favourable, and prayers ensured that rain did not disrupt the proceedings.

Following the walk, participants convened for breakfast and subsequently visit-

ed the Segamat convent, as several attendees being former students of the institution.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to committee chairman Benedict Pang, organising chairman Louis Vincent, James Paul, Joseph George, and all the volunteers for their unwavering dedication to the successful execution of this event.

Additionally, the Committee extends its gratitude to all donors who contributed to this important cause in support of underprivileged students. **Richard Joseph**



Letters to Editor

Gratitude for a sacred gift

Dear Editor,

I was overwhelmed when I read the article entitled "New outdoor stations of the cross at Batu Gajah parish" in the *HERALD* dated April 27, 2025. Being a former parishioner (for more than 50 years), I hold St Joseph's church Batu Gajah close to my heart.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the parish priest, Fr Michael Dass, for initiating the construction of the 14 stations of the cross in the parish grounds. It is indeed a great idea and will benefit both the parishioners and other visitors from neighbouring towns who can pray for their needs at the stations, besides experiencing, as Fr Michael says, 'a more immersive and personal connection with Jesus'.

I thank and praise God for this initiative which will be an additional attraction for those coming for the feast of St Joseph which will be celebrated in May. Well done Fr Michael and all who were involved in the construction of the outdoor Way of the Cross! May God bless you all abundantly!

*DMC Durairaj
Sitiawan, Perak*

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Please include your name and
address. *Letters without name and
address will not be entertained.*



Police Day celebration in Kuantan parish

KUANTAN: The 218th Police Day of the Royal Malaysian Police Force was commemorated on April 26 at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle.

Approximately 250 police personnel from the Pahang State Contingent, along with their families, comprising both Catholics and Christians of other denominations, participated in the event, led by ACP Paul Henry. They were joined by members of the Kuantan parish community, who came to show their support and appreciation for the police force's

dedicated service and sacrifices.

The celebration began with the Entrance procession with ACP Paul Henry and all the uniformed personnel. Then six members of the police force carried the "Jalur Gemilang" and the Police flag, accompanied by the sound of taped bagpipe music. This was followed by the singing of the national anthem, "Negaraku," and the Police anthem.

The bilingual Mass, celebrated in Bahasa Malaysia and English, was presided over by Fr George Packiasamy. In his homily, he expressed pride in commemorating

the 218th Police Day, honouring the unwavering courage, integrity, and sacrifice of police officers. He emphasised that policing is not merely a profession, but a vocation rooted in the call to protect, serve, and uphold peace.

Inspired by the Risen Lord's message, "Peace be with you," Fr George affirmed the community's steadfast support for those who foster trust and bring hope, even in the most difficult circumstances. Their dedication, he said, reflects Christ's love and strength. He concluded by affirming that the



The police walking in procession with the "Jalur Gemilang" and the police flag.

contributions of these uniformed heroes are deeply valued, respected, and will remain in the community's prayers.

In his closing address after the Mass, ACP Paul expressed his heartfelt thanks to Fr. George for granting permission to hold the celebration at the church, and to the organising committee for their dedication in making the event a success. He also conveyed his ap-

preciation to everyone present for their participation and support.

Addressing the police personnel, he reminded them to continue carrying out their duties with integrity and commitment, in order to uphold and enhance the image of the Royal Malaysian Police Force.

After group photographs were taken, all attendees were invited to a lunch and fellowship at the nearby church hall. **Dr Francis Leong**



Fr George Packiasamy with the police personnel.

Strengthening faith through Ignatian Spirituality

Clare Cheng and Chris Kushi

PENANG: Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, recently welcomed three Religious — Fr Pablo Trollano from the Institute of the Incarnate Word (IVE), and Sr Maria Filia Docilis and Sr Mary Joy of the Cross from the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará (SSVM), to the Diocese of Penang. In a special blessing ceremony, Cardinal Sebastian expressed his hope that their presence would inspire hope, foster vocations, and deepen the spiritual lives of local Catholics, especially among Mandarin-speaking youth.

Fr Pablo, an Argentinian priest currently serving in Taiwan and pursuing a PhD in Philosophy at Fu Jen Catholic University, stressed the importance of a sound understanding of the human person to counter modern ideologies. "Our mission is to guide people in faith



The panel of speakers.

and help them seek God's Will in their lives," he shared.

Sr Docilis, from the Church of the Immaculate Conception Penang, is active in pro-life ministry in Taiwan. Sr Joy, from Sabah, serves vulnerable girls in the Philippines. Both Religious Sisters emphasised their commitment to nurturing

spiritual growth through prayer, discernment, and active witness.

From March 28 to April 1, a historic five-day retreat, based on the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, was held at La Salle Centre, Ipoh — the first such in-depth Ignatian retreat in the diocese. Centred on the theme

"Faith Ignites the Soul, Truth Illuminates Life," the retreat drew young working adults eager to grow in faith.

Unlike conventional talks, sessions were presented in a dialogue format, covering issues relevant to modern life, like relationships, morality, and the meaning of Catholic identity. Workshops such as "Marriage? Not for me!" and "Can't I just be a good person and skip the rest?" sparked deep reflection. Feedback from participants included: "Anxiety is self-inflicted; I must surrender to God," and "I now see my mission is to set hearts on fire."

A complementary two-day retreat, *What's More Being a Catholic?* addressed real-life choices, challenges, and sources of lasting hope. A panel of diverse speakers, including both traditional and contemporary voices in the Church, led heartfelt conversations about internal struggles and

external pressures.

The impact was profound. "I received new life through this retreat," one participant said. Others shared experiences of inner healing, newfound clarity in discerning God's Will, and a growing desire for the sacraments and especially daily Mass and Reconciliation.

IGNIS (Latin for "fire"), the young adult organising team, described the retreat and workshop series as a true pilgrimage of conversion during this Jubilee Year of Hope 2025. Through silence, spiritual exercises, and honest dialogue, participants discovered a renewed love for Christ and courage to live out their faith in everyday life.

The Diocese of Penang gives thanks for the generosity of Fr Pablo, Sr Docilis, and Sr Joy in journeying with the faithful. Their presence and ministry testify to the vitality of the Church and the enduring call to follow Christ with heart and conviction.

Widows walking the path of faith together

PETALING JAYA: The grieving process is a long and arduous journey, with some losing sight of God along the way. With the objective of helping the recently bereaved and also those who are further along in their grief journey to navigate through their spiritual lives during this tumultuous period, the Widow to Widow ministry at the Church of St Francis Xavier organised a spiritual guidance session recently, facilitated by Fr Christopher Wee, SJ.

The session started with lunch. During this time of fellowship, the attendees mingled and got to know

each other in an informal yet secure setting where everyone shared the similar experiences of loss.

After lunch, Fr Christopher started the session by sharing his personal experience in dealing with grief. His heartfelt sharing touched the hearts of the participants who were able to relate well with the many facets of grief, yet at the same time, bringing them comfort and strength.

One of the questions often asked when faced with the loss of a loved one is, "Is there truly a God?" because, in moment of desperation, we long for a miracle, just like the

raising of Lazarus. Fr Christopher asked the participants to reflect on the moment when Jesus was nailed to the Cross; instead of fighting God, Jesus submitted to God's Will which in turn brought about salvation to all of us. "Stop fighting God; pause and pray, talk to Him," was the advice. The sharing of personal experiences by several veteran widows helped reinforce the need to hold onto God and be persistent in prayer throughout the grief journey.

Aptly described by one of the attendees, "We look beyond death, not at the lifeless body of our loved



The participants with Fr Christopher Wee, SJ

one."

Healing is found in the strength of community and no one should have to walk alone in the grief journey. Widow to Widow ministry is where widows come together, uplift, support and comfort

one another, walking hand in hand through this journey of loss, faith and renewal.

For more information about the Widow to Widow ministry, please contact Caroline Tay, Coordinator, at 012-7018185.

At jubilee, teens urged to listen

VATICAN: What began as a joyful pilgrimage for thousands of teenagers marking the Jubilee Year of Hope became a profound moment of mourning, as news broke of Pope Francis' death on April 21.

"We've been preparing since January," said 22-year-old Vincenzo Pirico from Pisa. "The spirit with which we participated truly changed." Many young pilgrims felt they were not just celebrating faith, but also honouring the memory of a pope who deeply loved and listened to youth.

Gustavo Molina from Ecuador called the news "a cold shower," yet said being in Rome allowed his group to say a final goodbye to "a pope very much loved, especially in the Hispanic community."

The Jubilee had planned to include the

canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis. Though Pope Francis approved the decree in May 2024, the closing Mass instead became a memorial for the late pope. His funeral on April 26 marked the start of nine days of mourning.

Still, the spirit of hope endured. Around 200,000 teenagers gathered in St Peter's Square, waving flags and singing hymns. Archbishop Nelson noted, "Pope Francis said young people are the now of God — and they're showing it today."

Many teens had known no other pope. Béatrice, 14, from France, said, "We wondered if the Jubilee would still happen... Luckily, it did!" Anna from Switzerland added, "It became a time of mourning and thanksgiving. The Pope was close to young

people. I remember his smile."

Fr Andrea Filippucci, from the US Virgin Islands, said his group of 100 pilgrims shifted focus from indulgences to reflection on St Peter, "a man who failed but was still loved." Youth pilgrim Briah Ryan said, "Despite the sadness, I was grateful. I'll remember this for the rest of my life."

On Divine Mercy Sunday, Cardinal Pietro Parolin urged the youth to carry on Francis' legacy: "In mercy, we discover the path to peace."

A final word came from Pope Francis himself, in a video recorded January 8 and released posthumously. "Dear boys and girls... one of the most important things in life is to listen," he said. "Listen, listen a lot."



Screenshot of the late Pope Francis in the video message recorded in mid-January 2024.

As teenagers continued their pilgrimage, they bore witness to Francis' final message: listen, love, and walk together. CNS



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, former Vatican secretary of state, receives the gifts offered by a group of young people while celebrating Mass on the second day of the "novendiali" — nine days of mourning for Pope Francis marked by Masses in St Peter's Square at the Vatican April 27, 2025. (CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)



A group of pilgrims from Quito, Ecuador, poses for a picture as they approach St Peter's Square during the Jubilee of Teenagers at the Vatican April 27, 2025. (CNS photo/Justin McLellan)

A Church where all are fully embraced

VATICAN: As part of the Holy Year 2025, the Vatican hosted the Jubilee of Persons with Disabilities, a powerful celebration of inclusion, dignity, and faith that resonated throughout Rome and across the global Church.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-Prefect Emeritus of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, celebrated Mass on April 28 at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls. In his homily, he invited the faithful to embrace what he called a "revolution of the ordinary" — a daring yet deeply human approach to integration where the Church transforms "them" into "us" through genuine welcome rather than spectacle.

"Inclusion," he said, "is not about exceptional actions or rhetoric. It's about restoring dignity, autonomy, and ensuring that no one, if truly welcomed, can remain alone."

Held at one of the Church's oldest pilgrimage sites, the Basilica underscored this mission by adapting its ancient architecture to new needs: ramps were installed at the marble stairways, allowing full access to the liturgy. The Eucharistic celebration innovated within tradition, offering real-time translation in LIS (International Sign Language) for all hymns and prayers — a meaningful step towards liturgical accessibility.

Archbishop Fisichella reflected on the healing of the paralysed man in the Acts of the Apostles, not as a moment of spectacle, but as a witness to the Church's mission: to help each person rise, walk, and participate fully. "The first community of believers did not ask for privileges," he said, "but for the courage not to remain silent".

Cristina Borlotti, who leads the Pastoral Office for Persons with Disabilities in the Diocese of Bergamo, echoed this commitment. Speaking to Vatican News, she emphasized the need to sow inclusion not through "special" initiatives, but within everyday life. "It starts with language," she said. "Not 'the

disabled,' but 'persons with disabilities.' Words can build bridges or walls."

This cultural shift — one Pope Francis has championed throughout his pontificate — was a recurring theme across the Jubilee events. At the conference *We: Pilgrims of Hope*, disability rights advocate Marta Russo introduced Marta's Thoughts, a national school campaign promoting accessible tourism and awareness. She called on young people to carry forward the Pope's call for a "cultural revolution" — one that puts the person, not their limitation, at the centre.

For many pilgrims, the Jubilee was not only symbolic but transformative. Luca, a young participant from Varmo, Italy, shared how such a journey to Rome would have been "unthinkable" in a wheelchair just a few years ago. Now, he dreams of a world where his experience of dignity, opportunity, and belonging becomes the norm for others.

The events continued April 29 in St



"can become an instrument of love. Take your disability and make it the strength of love that gives even more."

The Jubilee concluded with moments of prayer, a pilgrimage through the Holy Door, opportunities for confession and Eucharistic adoration, and a festive gathering at Castel Sant'Angelo. Along the Via della Conciliazione, food stands and testimonies filled the air with witness to the beauty and strength of life lived in fragility — not as something less, but as something deeply sacred.

Peter's Square with catechesis led by Archbishop Fisichella, supported by interpreters in multiple sign languages. There, he shared the moving story of Blessed Hermann of Reichenau — born in 1014 with a cleft palate and cerebral palsy, yet the author of the beloved hymn *Salve Regina*. "Weakness," said the Archbishop,

As Archbishop Fisichella reminded all gathered, the true sign of the Church's credibility lies not in grand declarations, but in creating a community where every person — regardless of ability — is seen, heard, and fully embraced. **Edoardo Giribaldi, Vatican News**



A choir signs during Mass as part of the Jubilee of People with Disabilities at St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome April 28, 2025. (CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)

Understanding

A mix of tradition, pageantry



The Origins and Process of the Papal Conclave

The method of electing a pope has evolved significantly over the centuries. During the first millennium, various approaches were used, but the process gradually became more structured, increasingly narrowing the group of electors. A major turning point came in 1179, when Pope Alexander III formally established that only cardinals would be authorized to vote in papal elections, defining the electoral college as it is recognized today.

The word “conclave,” now synonymous with the papal election, has its roots in the Latin *com* (together) and *clavis* (key). It underscores the intense secrecy surrounding the process, as cardinals are locked away, literally “with a key,” until they reach a decision.

This tradition began in dramatic fashion in 1268, following the death of Pope Clement IV. Nineteen cardinals gathered in the town of Viterbo, about 70 kilometres north of Rome, but were unable to agree on a successor for nearly three years. Frustrated by the delay, the local population confined the cardinals to a locked room, reducing their meals to bread and water and even removing the roof of the building to pressure them into a decision. In 1271, they finally elected Gregory X, who, evidently convinced by the method’s effectiveness, officially established the conclave as the standard procedure for papal elections at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274.

Over the subsequent eight centuries, the conclave has remained remarkably consistent, with only modest changes. The most significant update came in 1970, when Pope Paul VI *pic* decreed that only cardinals under the age of 80 could participate as electors and set a theoretical maximum of 120 voting cardinals.

Today, the conclave is convened during the *interregnum* (the period between the death of a pope and the election of his successor), also known by the Latin term *sede vacante*, meaning “vacant seat.” The pope’s body lies in state for three to five days, giving time for public mourning. The funeral Mass and burial typically occur between the fourth and sixth day after death. Although formal deliberations are delayed until after



Cardinals from around the world line up in the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel March 12, 2013, to take their oaths at the beginning of the conclave to elect a successor to Pope Benedict XVI. (CNS/Vatican Media)

the funeral out of respect, conversations among cardinals and potential candidates often begin discreetly beforehand, as discussions about the qualities needed in the next pontiff naturally emerge.

Typically held 15 to 20 days after the pope’s passing, the conclave marks a solemn yet pivotal moment for the Catholic Church. Behind the sealed doors, amid prayer and debate, the cardinals cast their votes, guided by tradition, faith, and the weight of history.

What’s a cardinal?

Cardinals are the highest-ranking clergy of the Catholic Church, after the pope. Originally, cardinals were the princes of the papal court. They often came from the powerful families of the Papal States. They wear red as a sign of their willingness to shed their blood for the pope and the Church.

Only the pope can make a clergy member a cardinal and, once appointed, they typically hold that title and position for life. As cardinals, they serve as advisors to the pope, regardless of where they reside and often hold elevated positions within the Vatican.

Any member of the Catholic clergy can be a cardinal but the appointment is traditionally reserved for high-ranking clergy such as bishops and archbishops. The pope reserves the right to make any member of the Church a cardinal, including laity. Francis expanded the College of Cardinals beyond the large dioceses and archdioceses to create geographic and cultural diversity and to better represent the makeup of the laity and where the Church is growing.

Selecting a pope as part of the conclave is considered a cardinal’s highest duty. Those who do so are known as cardinal electors.

How many cardinals are in the conclave?

It varies. While all cardinals are summoned to the Vatican upon the pope’s death, only those under the age of 80 are eligible to participate in the conclave. Those aged 80 and older can decline the summons if they wish, since they aren’t allowed to be conclave members.

There are currently 252 cardinals worldwide. The preparatory meetings they have daily during the interregnum are collectively known as the General Congregation. Of the total number of cardinals, 135 are

eligible to enter the conclave as cardinal electors. This will be the largest number of cardinals to participate in a conclave.

Who’s in charge of the Vatican during the *sede vacante*?

The *camerlengo*, or chamberlain, of the Church runs things during the conclave, including overseeing the conclave itself.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, 77, the senior Vatican official who announced Pope Francis’ death on Monday, April 21, will serve as the interim manager of the Vatican until a new pope is elected, according to Church officials. Pope Francis appointed Farrell as *camerlengo* in 2019.

Who’s eligible to be elected pope?

Canon law says any unmarried, baptised male Catholic, clergy or not, is eligible to be pope. However, the last time a non-cardinal was elected was in 1378, when Bartolomeo Prignano was placed on Peter’s throne under the name Urban VI. This choice ultimately proved unfortunate, as Urban VI’s death triggered the Western Schism — a period during which up to three different men claimed to be the legitimate successor of the Apostle Peter.

That said, only cardinals have been elected for the last 600-plus years, so being considered for the position in this case is very much the result of whom you know.



Cardinals gather in the New Synod Hall at the Vatican for their fifth general congregation meeting April 28, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

All likely or potential papal candidates are collectively known as “papabile.” Politics and personalities aside, one of the paramount considerations when determining papabile is a candidate’s age.

The ideal papal candidate is between 60 and 70 years old, with the ideal time in office considered to be from 10 to 12 years. If too young a pope is elected, he could end up overseeing and influencing Church doctrine for decades, since only death or resignation would end their time in the office. Conversely, if too old, a candidate is elected they may have little time to make an impact.

John Paul II, at 58, was young when elected and Francis, at 76, was considered old.

How secret are the conclave’s discussions?

In a word? Very. Balloting takes place in the Sistine Chapel amid a level of security that wouldn’t be out of place in a government situation room. Recording technology of any kind is forbidden, with technicians checking to ensure there are no secretly installed bugs or other like devices inside the Sistine Chapel or adjacent areas. Any handwritten notes cardinals may take during the proceedings are burned after each morning and afternoon session, along with that session’s ballots.

During the conclave, the cardinals reside in private rooms in the Domus Marthae Sanctae, aka St Martha’s House — essentially a hotel in the Vatican with dining facilities that typically houses visiting clergy and laity. Conclave members are sworn to absolute secrecy and have minimal contact with the outside world: Televisions, radios, phones, cameras, computers, newspapers and magazines are banned, and no written or verbal correspondence with anyone outside the conclave is allowed. Likewise, the Sistine Chapel, Domus Marthae Sanctae and other areas are off limits during the conclave to everyone other than cardinals and those people who have specific business there, such as service staff, support personnel and physicians.

Also, don’t expect a cardinal to share any inside scoop after balloting is complete and the new pope is elected. That expectation of secrecy continues indefinitely, with only the pope himself possessing the authority to make exceptions.

the conclave

and practical necessity

What is the actual voting process like?

Though wreathed in centuries of elaborate ceremony and tradition, the balloting process itself is straightforward. In theory, a cardinal cannot vote for himself. Each conclave member writes his choice on a paper ballot slip, folds it once in half and carries it held aloft between two fingers as he walks to the altar and deposits it in a special urn placed there that is used only for that purpose. In order to make the balloting secret, conclave members are instructed to write their votes “as far as possible in handwriting that cannot be identified as his.” Any conclave member who cannot make it in person to the Sistine Chapel due to illness or infirmity will cast their ballot from their room in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, where they’re collected, placed in a lock-box and carried to the Sistine Chapel.

The votes are then counted by three scrutineers who affirm what is written on each ballot and then announce it to the conclave, so the cardinals can record the votes themselves. If the number of ballots cast is different than the number of cardinal electors, those ballots are discarded and burned and a new vote taken.

The candidate who first secures two-thirds of the votes is elected pope.

How long does it take to elect a pope?

A pope could be elected as soon as the first ballot, or the process could continue indefinitely. That said, since 1831 no conclave has lasted more than four days.

Up to four rounds of voting can typically take place in a day. If no clear choice has emerged after three days, balloting is suspended for 24 hours to allow cardinal electors time to reflect. Another seven rounds of balloting then takes place, followed by another break, and so on.

If no pope is elected after 33 or 34 votes – generally about 13 days – then a new rule introduced by Pope Benedict XVI decrees that the two leading candidates as determined by previous ballots engage in a runoff vote. The candidates themselves, if members of the conclave, cannot vote in the runoff but are present for it. Whichever candidate receives the necessary two-thirds majority of the votes is the new pope.

What has been the shortest conclave?

To be elected, a candidate must secure at least two-thirds of the votes. Recent conclaves have managed to designate a new pope quickly. For instance, Benedict XVI in 2005 was elected on the second day of the conclave after just four rounds of voting. One must look back to 1922 to find a conclave that lasted more than four days – the election of Pius XI took five days and 14 ballots. Seventeen years later, the cardinals needed less than 24 hours and only three ballots to elect his successor, Pius XII, making the 1939 conclave the shortest in history. On the eve of World War II, the cardinals clearly wished to avoid leaving the faithful in prolonged uncertainty.

What has been the longest conclave?

While the election of Gregory X in 1271 was the longest in history – with the Apostolic See remaining vacant for three years – the longest modern conclave occurred in 1740. Opened on February 18,

Inside the Conclave

The world watches with interest as cardinals gather in conclave – literally under lock and key – to elect the next pope. The rarity of the event, the ceremony and secrecy add to the intrigue.

Sistine Chapel

The centuries-old chapel adorned with Michelangelo’s frescoes has been the site of every papal election since 1878.

Its Marble floor is covered with wood. The windows and doors are shut as the Master of Papal Liturgical Ceremonies exclaims, “Extra omnes!” (“Everybody else, out!”)

A sweep is performed for electronic devices, even on the electors.

Cardinal Electors

Placing a hand on the Gospels, each one swears to uphold the rules and secrecy of the conclave. Any communication with people outside is forbidden. They may not receive messages or news.

Cardinals under the age of 80 when the see became vacant may vote in the conclave. There are 135 eligible cardinals at this time.

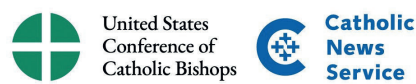
Ballots and Voting

Votes are handwritten and cast individually into special urns. The top of the ballot reads “Eligo in Summun Pontificem” (“I elect as the Supreme Pontiff”).

Ballots are counted by three “scrutineers.” The work is checked by three “revisers.” The ballot counters and verifiers are chosen by lot at the start of the conclave.

One round of voting is expected the first day. Each day after, two votes are taken in the morning and two votes in the afternoon until a successful vote. Should the conclave extend longer than 4 days, the electors will spend additional time in prayer and discussion before voting resumes.

A two-thirds majority is required to elect the new pope.



ROME
VATICAN CITY
Sistine Chapel
St. Peter's Basilica
St. Peter's Square

The Sistine Chapel ceiling was painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512. He also painted “The Last Judgment” fresco above the altar between 1535 and 1541.

During the conclave, cardinals stay in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, a guesthouse on the edge of Vatican City. They take short bus rides or walk to their sessions.

How Long Will It Last?
The last seven conclaves lasted only a few days.

Pope	Days	Ballots
Francis	2	5
Benedict XVI	2	4
John Paul II	2	8
John Paul I	1	4
Paul VI	2	6
John XXIII	3	11
Pius XII	1	3

“Habemus Papam”
The one who is elected is asked if he accepts the election as pope. If he accepts, he chooses the name he will take. From the central balcony of St. Peter’s basilica, the senior cardinal deacon proclaims, “Habemus papam!” (“We have a pope!”), and announces his name. The new pontiff appears on the balcony and imparts his first papal blessing.

A chimney is installed on the roof of the Sistine Chapel for the conclave. In the back corner of the chapel, a stove is set to burn ballots and related papers, including notes taken by the electors, each morning and afternoon.

If balloting is not successful, the smoke burns black with the help of an added chemical.

If balloting is successful, a chemical is added to produce the celebratory white smoke – the signal that the Church has a new pope.

The world watches with interest as cardinals gather May 7, 2025, in conclave – literally under lock and key – to elect the next pope. The rarity of the event, the ceremony and secrecy add to the intrigue. (CNS graphic/Jerome Podojil, USCCB)

it did not conclude until August 17, with the election of Benedict XIV. It took six months for the approximately 50 cardinals present (a number that fluctuated during the election due to late arrivals and the death of some electors) to agree on a name. This conclave was particularly prolonged due in part to the “right of exclusion,” a prerogative granted to certain sovereigns to veto the election of a cardinal. This practice is now strictly prohibited.

How does the conclave signal that they’ve elected a new pope?

Of all the ceremonies associated with electing a new pope, the one most familiar to the general public is the smoke that emanates from a stovepipe chimney atop the Sistine Chapel after every round of balloting.

Black smoke – *fumata nera* in Italian – indicates an inconclusive vote, while white smoke – *fumata bianca* – will signify that a new pope has been elected. Along with the white smoke, the bells of St Peter’s Basilica will ring to proclaim the event to the world.

However, that ceremonial smoke isn’t created by the burning of the ballots, as commonly believed – that’s done in a stove that dates back to the 1922 conclave and is set up for the occasion in the Sistine Chapel. The smoke that wafts from the chimney is created using chemical pellets that are burned in another stove that’s connected to the stovepipe chimney, which is temporarily erected atop the Sistine Chapel just for that purpose.

When is the pope’s identity publicly revealed?

Assuming the elected cardinal accepts the office, the new pope’s identity is revealed within an hour of the final ballot.

Before he’s presented to the public, the new pope is also asked by what name he will be known. While popes have the option of keeping their baptismal name, every pope for the last 470 years has chosen to change his name, usually to honour a predecessor and to signal their intention to emulate his example. Pope Francis was a notable exception, instead choosing his name to honour St Francis of Assisi, the 13th century cleric now celebrated in the Church as the patron saint of animals and the environment.

The new pope is then attired in temporary vestments prepared in various sizes for the occasion and awaits his formal introduction by the senior cardinal deacon, who stands on the balcony on the facade of St Peter’s Basilica, overlooking St Peter’s Square, and declares in Latin: *Nuntio vobis gaudium magnum: habemus papam* – “I announce to you a great joy: We have a pope.”

The new pope then emerges onto the balcony to present himself to the world and deliver his first blessing to the crowd gathered below in St Peter’s Square.

Although the elected pope immediately has full authority and jurisdiction, a ceremonial Mass to install the new pope is held about a week after his election, either in St Peter’s Square or St Peter’s Basilica, with cardinals, bishops and other international dignitaries present. Up until the middle of the last century

the installation was a coronation with a three-tiered crown.

When does the conclave end?

As soon as the new pontiff has assented to his election, the conclave is over, though the assembled cardinals will remain at the Vatican until the attendant ceremonies are over. In 2013, Francis asked the cardinals to stay in the conclave for an extra day to pray with him.

How did the election of Pope Francis unfold?

Convened on March 12, 2013, the conclave that led to the election of Pope Francis was unique because the cardinals had ample time to prepare, as it began one month after Benedict XVI announced his decision to retire from the governance of the Church. Out of the 117 cardinal electors, two chose not to participate – one for health reasons and the other due to his resignation from his diocese. European cardinals were in the majority in the Sistine Chapel, numbering no less than 60, including 28 Italians. At that time, the average age of the electors was 77.

It took just over 24 hours and five rounds of voting for the cardinals to agree on the new pope. The Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, was elected March 13, 2013. Surprising his fellow cardinals and observers around the world, he chose to adopt a papal name that had never been used before – Francis. He explained a few days later that he made this choice in honour of St Francis of Assisi and to express his desire for a “poor Church for the poor.”

Joseph Tek Choon Yee

My family and I made a Jubilee Year pilgrimage, walking together through the Holy Doors of Rome. More than a physical journey, it was a sacred encounter — one that stirred the soul.

As a family, we stepped into a moment that comes only once every 25 years, drawn by a shared longing for renewal, mercy and deeper faith. The next Holy Year will be in 2050. I may not have the health or strength to do it then — or may not even be around. That thought isn't sad — just a quiet call to be fully present, to walk these doors not only for myself but for those I love and for generations to come.

We journeyed through the Eternal City, hearts humbled among fellow pilgrims from across the world, from St Paul Outside the Walls, to St John Lateran and the Marian beauty of Santa Maria Maggiore. Each Holy Door felt like a threshold into deeper communion with God, and with one another. We participated in prayers, Mass and the sacrament of Reconciliation. We had planned to enter the final Holy Door (St Peter's Basilica) on Easter Monday, after celebrating the joyous Easter Mass in the presence of Pope Francis. But Heaven had its own plans.

That Easter Sunday, bells rang and *Alleluias* echoed across Rome but the next morning, the world received the saddest news that Pope Francis had passed away. The Easter Mass we attended became his final Mass. A bittersweet liturgy, now etched in our hearts forever.

When we finally stepped through our last Holy Door of St Peter's, it was no longer just a moment of completion, it became a farewell. A deeply moving and unforgettable act of love and gratitude to a shepherd who had led the flock with humility, simplicity, full of love and courage.

Just catching our flight, we were blessed to witness a solemn moment in sacred history, Pope Francis' simple wooden coffin carried from his humble residence at Casa Santa Marta to St Peter's Basilica. Later, among tens of thousands, we joined pilgrims, clergy, and mourners from around the world to pay our final respects — united in love and gratitude for a shepherd who gave so much of himself. Now, he lies in state, awaiting his funeral on Saturday.

In keeping with the simplicity that defined his life and ministry, Pope Francis chose not to be buried within the grand halls of the Vatican, but at the Santa Maria Maggiore, a smaller, beloved basilica he often visited in quiet prayer, located beyond the Vatican walls. It is a tender, telling gesture. He will be the first pope to be laid to rest there since the 1600s, and the first in over a century to be buried outside the Vatican grounds.

True to form, he asked for nothing elaborate. Just a simple tomb in the earth, marked only by a plain gravestone bearing a single word: Francis. No titles. No grandeur. Just the name he carried as a humble servant of God.

Even in death, Pope Francis sought to teach — stripping down the funeral rites to offer one final lesson to the Church he loved so deeply. A lesson in humility. In returning to the essence of faith. His final resting place is not just a burial — it is a symbol, a prayer and his quiet call for the Church to keep walking the path of compassion, simplicity and mercy.

Jubilee Year and Holy Doors

For Catholics all over the world, the Jubilee Year holds



Walking through the Holy Doors during the Jubilee Year.

Jubilee pilgrimage and final farewell



The Tek family at Easter Sunday Mass at St Peter's Basilica, and Pope Francis meeting the people on his Popemobile.

deep meaning. One of the most cherished traditions during this sacred time is making a pilgrimage to the Holy Doors. At first glance, it might just look like a doorway, but to Catholics, it's a powerful symbol. Walking through it represents crossing from darkness into light, from sin into grace, from weariness into renewed hope. It's a spiritual homecoming.

For my family, this journey wasn't just about ticking a box or seeing famous places, although all pilgrims will be awed with the beauty of the basilicas. It's about pausing our busy lives, grounding ourselves in faith, being one with family and saying: God, we still believe. Help our unbelief.

We're not making this pilgrimage because we're perfect. Far from it. We go because we're human - in need of mercy, of healing, of God's gentle touch. We go to give thanks for all we've received, and to carry in prayers of those family members and our many friends who can't be there.

Crossing the Holy Door doesn't change everything overnight. But it marks a step. A choice. A reminder that even at any age and whoever we are, we are still journeying, still growing, still being drawn deeper into God's love. And maybe, just maybe, that's the whole point.

What was meant to be a pilgrimage of renewal and jubilation also became a time of sacred mourning for us. Yet in that blend of joy and sorrow, we discovered something timeless — the strength of faith, the power of family, and the quiet grace found even in farewell. Along the way, we met fellow pilgrims and encountered "human angels" who appeared in moments of difficulty, reminding us that grace often walks beside us in human form.

Remembering Pope Francis: He Waited for Easter

During our pilgrimage to Rome, as we journeyed through the sacred days of the Easter Triduum, one single liturgy

from Holy Thursday, Good Friday to the glory of Easter Sunday, we had no idea that we would also become witnesses to a moment of profound historical and spiritual significance: the passing of Pope Francis.

My family and I stood in St Peter's Square that Easter morning, part of the crowd of 35,000 faithful gathered beneath the Roman sky for the Easter Mass. As the curtains parted on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, a hush fell over the crowd. The roar of anticipation gave way to reverent silence as the Holy Father surprisingly appeared. He raised his hand in blessing, a gesture now as tender as it was powerful. His voice, though strained, carried across the square: "Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a happy Easter." Those seven words, spoken with great effort, would become his final public message.

Personally, I think many people could feel something. As if they knew, it was the last time they'd see him. There was no booming chant of "Viva il Papa!" like in past years. Instead, the square was filled with something deeper — an unspoken reverence. It was much quieter than usual. Little did we know, he was giving us his last goodbye. Not with fanfare or speeches, but with his presence. With breath. With one final blessing from the heart of a shepherd who, even in suffering, chose to show up for his flock.

But that was not all. As the celebration drew to a close, Pope Francis made an unannounced appearance in his popemobile. Slowly, gently, he was driven among the faithful, waving, blessing, kissing babies, touching hearts. My family were so close, close enough to meet his gaze and return his wave. The air was filled with sacred joy — radiant, communal, unforgettable. It felt like a gift wrapped in grace; one we didn't yet know was a farewell.

Our hearts were heavy the next day. We didn't realise, at that moment, that we were witnessing his final hours of public ministry. That his gentle wave, his serene smile, and his quiet strength that Easter morning would be his last. Looking back, it's as if Pope Francis waited — held on through the holiest days of the Church's year — just long enough to proclaim with us all: "Jesus Christ is Risen!" Then, in the peace of Easter Monday at 7.35am, he whispered his own final Amen, and returned to the Father. He had carried out his duty as shepherd for his flock till his last breath.

A Journey of Grace

As for my family, we were deeply blessed to make our Jubilee pilgrimage during Holy Week — walking through the Holy Doors, receiving the Jubilee Indulgence, joining Easter Mass and receiving Pope Francis' final *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. And unexpectedly the next day, we mourned his passing and were granted the grace to pay our last respects.

Yes. It was as though he waited for Easter — because he believed in the promise of resurrection. Now, that promise is his. Light has found him. And Love has brought him home. To witness these sacred moments together — as a family — was a gift beyond words. A journey of faith, love and hope we will never forget. May Pope Francis rest in the peace he so often wished upon others. Happy Easter.

Serving the Church

My work experience has traversed government service, private, and corporate sectors. Yet my current role within the Church, in the Catholic Diocese of Penang, surpasses all in its distinctiveness and profound impact. Unlike conventional organisations, the Church transcends the realm of mere institutions; it embodies a divine calling – a collective mission to spread the Gospel. Consequently, the term ‘work for the church’ seems inadequate to describe my engagement, I prefer to say I am deeply committed to ‘serving’ in fulfilling a sacred purpose.

The spiritual hierarchy within the Church is a cornerstone of its identity. Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang, has impressed upon me many times that cardinals, archbishops and bishops are not merely leaders but Apostolic Successors, carrying forth the legacy of the Apostles. The priests, religious, and deacons are disciples assisting the apostolic successors in this mission on earth. Therefore, whatever role we play in assisting the apostolic successors and disciples, underscores the sacredness of our mission. This spiritual lineage is a far cry from the corporate titles of CEOs or managers; it is a legacy rooted in faith and tradition, one that we hold in the highest regard. On Maundy Thursday, Cardinal Sebastian sent out a social media poster with the words ‘Priest > > Servant’.

My interactions with Archbishop Julian Leow of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Bishop Bernard Paul of the Malacca Johore Diocese, and Cardinal Sebastian in Penang Diocese, have been nothing short of enlightening. Their shared humility, dedication, and spiritual leadership have left a lasting impact on my understanding of service in the Church.

Throughout my career, I have navigated the complex waters of dispute resolutions, where the phrase ‘wash my hands’ often signify closure. However, Cardinal Sebastian has transformed my perspective on this expression. In our discussion to resolve certain issues, as per my habit, I will say, ‘Your Eminence, we can wash our hands of this matter now’, and believe me, this will cause Cardinal to give me a dressing down: “We bishops don’t wash our hands, like Pontius Pilate, we go deeper into the mud”. This statement is not merely philosophical but also encapsulates the essence of ecclesiastical leadership. Bishops do not shy away from challenges, instead they immerse themselves in the complexities of human struggles, offering spiritual guidance and solace. The Pontius Pilate effect is to presume that by washing your hands, you have removed your own responsibility in the matter. Now I know better!

Cardinal Sebastian’s approach to opinion sharing is markedly different from that of secular bosses. Instead of seeking immediate answers from subordinates, he emphasizes reflection and prayer. His common retort is, “Reflect and pray about it and come back to me”. Rather than seeking immediate answers, this way encourages a deeper connection with the Divine, fostering thoughtful and compassionate solutions. This approach not only enriches the decision-making process but also reinforces the spiritual foundation of our actions.

Assisting within the church transcends the boundaries of conventional work. It immerses us in a spiritual existence, offering an experience that is as unique as it is beautiful. The Clergy which includes cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priest, religious and

deacons are not infallible beings adorned with halos. They experience a spectrum of human emotions, including laughter, joy, anger and sadness as evidenced by Cardinal Sebastian’s candid moments.

This human dimension makes them relatable, transforming from reverence to accessible spiritual guides who shepherd us in our journey of faith.

The culture of gratitude within the Church further sets it apart. Traditional expressions of ‘thank you’ are replaced with blessings, a spiritual acknowledgement of one’s contributions. Cardinal Sebastian doesn’t say thank you, Cardinal offers ‘Blessings’ in person or through social media messages, where it is a profound gesture that transcends mere words, signifying deep spiritual validation. This unique practice underscores the sacred nature of our roles.

The Diocese of Penang, encompassing the states of Perak, Penang, Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan, relies on effective communication, through Penang Diocese Social Communications to keep the Catholic faithful informed. News of events is shared through platforms such as the *Herald Malaysia*, Diocese of Penang website, and concise WhatsApp social media postings. While these updates may appear easy to some, only media practitioners will understand that they involve meticulous effort and immense pressure. Each click of the ‘send’ icon is accompanied by a wave of anxiety, for errors can have



Turun Padang

CHRISTOPHER KUSHI

significant repercussions, as with the latest flag issue in Malaysian media. People don’t see the meticulous cross-checking and research that go into crafting even a brief two-paragraph update which often consumes a few hours. Once sent out into social media, that is it, if there are errors in content, no turning back with a simple ‘minta maaf’ (sorry). No wonder nobody else seem to do it! This demanding process highlights the responsibility entrusted to me by Cardinal Sebastian and the Catholic Diocese of Penang for which I am thankful.

TURUN PADANG, my post handle, is taken from a phrase that Cardinal Sebastian often quotes in his homilies and speeches. Cardinal Sebastian often thunders in his homilies, ‘Move out of your comfort zones and go to the ground, Turun Padang!’ This, in effect, also highlights Cardinal Sebastian’s affinity with our dear late Holy Father’s repeated call for the Church to be a ‘field hospital’ which helps the suffering and marginalised through love, mercy, and charity.

In conclusion, assisting the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, religious and deacons is a journey that intertwines spiritual growth with professional engagement. It is a realm where reflection, prayer, and blessings replace conventional work dynamics. This unique experience has enriched my understanding of leadership, humility, and the profound impact of spiritual guidance. As we assist in the Church, we embrace a calling that transcends the ordinary, offering a glimpse into a beautiful and divine existence

Christopher Kushi possesses experience across a diverse array of job portfolios both in government and private sector. He is happy to share his professional journey and is engaging with the principles outlined in Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* to transcend border and embrace a culture of fraternity, social friendship and dialogue.

The wonder and love of the Good Shepherd

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” These opening words of Psalm 23 are one of the most beloved in all of Scripture and indeed is a favourite of mine. Perhaps it is the feeling of peace, security, and contentment that the words of this psalm evoke.

In a world that is so uncertain, the image of the Good Shepherd, walking alongside us, offering rest beside still waters, is a picture of comfort and hope for all of us and speaks to the yearning in every heart.

A real-life Good Shepherd

Now when I think about Good Shepherds, the most apt image I have in my mind is that of the late Pope Francis – an image he embodied so consistently throughout his papacy. As shared by many, from the very beginning, he reflected Christ’s own tenderness, humility, and fierce love for the least, the lost, and the lonely.

Like the Good Shepherd portrayed in the Bible, Pope Francis sought to nourish, heal, and reconcile in every corner of the world. He was someone who truly knew, loved and served the Lord. It was also during his papacy that my Catholic faith was renewed and strengthened and I began to once again feel like I belonged to the universal Catholic Church.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and we are invited to think about how we can be a shepherd to others through our words and deeds and I have shared some suggestions of how you can start at the end of this article. However, this year, I thought we could reflect and embrace some of the wonder, love and tenderness the Good Shepherd offers us in Psalm 23.

He sees us as we are

Most of us, especially parents, tend to feel invisible or just overworked, overstressed, – each day the same as before, running a rat race but realising we are actually on a never-ending circle of the dreaded hamster wheel,

unsure of where we are going, watching time fly by. Sometimes life just doesn’t seem fulfilled with all the mundane, routine things we do. Or perhaps we are seniors or empty nesters, not quite sure how to fill our days, feeling lonely, possibly unfulfilled and feeling half of the person we once used to be.

However, Jesus tells us He knows His sheep, and they know Him. The Good Shepherd sees each of us. Not just the version we choose to show the world, but the real, imperfect versions of ourselves. And this Good Shepherd sees us as we are and loves us despite our mess and there is such deep comfort in knowing that before He formed us in the womb, He knew each one of us. We don’t need to be perfect for Him to love and care for us.

He shepherds us

Not all of us are born leaders. Sometimes to learn how to lead, we need to allow ourselves to be led. The Good Shepherd offers us an example of one who provides respite, mercy and forgiveness – a guide who never abandons us, who will walk with us through the ups and downs, through valleys and hills, one who leads us beside still waters. The one who pursues us, who leaves the 99 sheep behind, and goes out to look for us, that one lost, lonely sheep. And while we learn these great values, we are also never alone in life’s hardest moments. He is always there walking besides us and shepherding us down the right paths, if we listen to His voice.

He gives us peace

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters.” The Good Shepherd is one who calms our troubled hearts and weary minds and bodies. Who makes us lie down and gives us much needed rest. Sometimes we feel that we can’t allow ourselves that time away – that time to pause. Chores need to be done, projects need to be

completed, work needs to be sorted, so we can’t rest.

But the Good Shepherd invites us to do just that. To lie down and to rest, to be still. Taking time to rest will calm our souls and rejuvenate our minds and bodies. And the Good Shepherd can be found there in the quietness and stillness, ready to restore your spirit.

He is our only certainty

Psalm 23 says that, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff – they comfort me.” How often do we lie awake thinking about death and what lies beyond. We fear that sometimes – that darkest valley. So, it’s no wonder that Psalm 23 is quoted on headstones aplenty.

And for most of us, we feel so alone with our problems, our mistakes, our grief and shame. Often, we feel unworthy of love and forgiveness, but the only certainty is this – God, our Good Shepherd loves us despite it all. Through confession we are made new, and whole. And at the end of the day, His rod and His staff will be there to comfort us, a thing of strength to keep us from harm so that though we may walk through difficult seasons and eras of our lives, we need never fear.

So, while we open our hearts to embrace how truly amazing the Good Shepherd is, here are five possible ways for us to start being shepherds in the world today:

1. Have a listening ear: Listen before you speak. Sometimes, all one needs is someone to sit with them and listen to what they have to say. Be it a troubled friend or a stranger with a story, choose to listen with the heart of Christ.
2. Being present and attentive: Someone who is a Good Shepherd stays close to their flock knowing all their needs. In our fast-paced lives, being truly present—undistracted and attentive—is one of the most powerful gifts

we can give.

3. Look out for the lost: There are so many people who are lost, who feel left out, lonely, or overlooked. Like the Good Shepherd, don’t wait for them to return – leave your 99 sheep and meet with someone who needs you.

4. Lead with mercy and grace: Often times, it is easy to get angry or point fingers when someone hurts or wrongs us. But the heart of the Good Shepherd is kind and forgiving and full of mercy and grace. Be quick to forgive and show kindness, for you might be someone’s first glimpse of God’s love.

5. Be brave and courageous: Shepherds protect their flock from all harm so as people of God, let us use our voices, however small we think it is, let us use it to stand up and speak out for the voiceless, those who are marginalised and vulnerable.

Dear reader, I invite you to keep this beautiful psalm close to your heart, to be taken out and remembered on days when we feel alone or restless or when we feel disconnected from God. Allow the Good Shepherd to lead us beside still waters, to restore our souls and make us whole. May goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives and may we learn how to shepherd each other as taught by our own Good Shepherd.

Joanne Wong is on a journey towards having faith the size of a mustard seed. She welcomes thoughts and suggestions on how to have a closer walk with God. Email her at joanne.wpm@gmail.com



Mustard Seed Journeys

JOANNE WONG



Fr Ron Rolheiser

A needed reminder

A Benedictine monk shared this story with me. During his early years in religious life, he had been resentful because he was required to ask permission from his Abbott if he wanted anything: "I thought it was silly, me, a grown man, an adult, having to ask a superior if I wanted a new shirt. I felt like a child."

But as he aged his perspective changed: "I'm not sure of all the reasons, though I'm sure they have to do with grace, but one day I came to realise that there was some deep wisdom in having to ask permission for everything. We don't own anything; nothing comes to us by right."

Everything is gift. So ideally everything should be asked for and not taken as if it were ours by right. We need to be grateful to God and the universe for everything that's been given us. Now, when I need something and need to ask permission from the Abbott, I no longer feel like a child. Rather, I feel that I'm more properly in tune with the way things should be in a gift-oriented universe within which nobody has a right to ultimately claim anything."

What this monk came to understand is a principle which undergirds all spirituality, all morality, and every one of the commandments, namely, that every-

thing comes to us as gift, nothing can be claimed as if owed to us. We should be grateful to God and to the universe for giving us what we have and careful not to claim, as by right, anything more.

But this goes against much in our instinctual selves and within our culture. Within both, there are strong voices which tell us that if you cannot take what you want then you're a weak person, weak in a double way. First, you're a weak personality, too timid to fully claim life. Second, you've been weakened by religious and moral scruples and are unable to properly seize the day and be fully alive. These voices tell us that we need to grow up because there is much in us that's fearful and infantile, a child held captive by superstitious forces.

It's precisely because of these voices that today, in a culture that professes to be Christian and moral, leading political and social figures can in all sincerity believe and say that empathy is a human weakness.

We need an important reminder.

The voice of Jesus is radically antithetical to these voices. Empathy is the penultimate human virtue, the antithesis of weakness. Jesus would look on so much that is assertive, aggressive, and accumulative within our society and,

notwithstanding the admiration it receives, tell us clearly that this is not what it means to come to the banquet which lies at the heart of God's kingdom. He would not share our admiration of the rich and famous who too often claim, as by right, their excessive wealth and status. When Jesus states that it is harder for a rich person to go to heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, he might have qualified this by adding: "Unless, of course, the rich person, childlike, asks permission from the universe, from the community, and from God, for every new shirt!"

When I was a religious novice, our novice master tried to impress upon us the meaning of religious poverty by making us write inside every book that was given to us the Latin words: *ad usum*. Literally: for your use. The idea was that, although this book was given to you for your personal use, you didn't own it. It was only for your use; real ownership lay elsewhere. We were then told that this was true as well of everything else given to us for our personal use, from our toothbrushes to the shirts on our backs. They were not really ours, merely given to us for our use.

One of the young men in that novitiate group who left the order is today a medi-

cal doctor. He remains a close friend and he once shared with me how today, as a doctor, he still writes those words *ad usum* in every one of his books. His rational is this: "I don't belong to a religious order. I don't have a vow of poverty, but the principle our novice master taught us is just as valid for me in the world as it is for a religious novice. We don't own anything. Those books aren't really mine. They've been given to me, temporarily, for my use. Nothing ultimately belongs to anybody and it's best never to forget that."

No matter how rich, strong, and grown-up we are, there's something healthy in having to ask permission to buy a new shirt. It keeps us attuned to the fact that the universe belongs to everyone, to God ultimately. Everything comes to us as gift and so we may never take anything for granted, but only as granted!

Oblate Fr Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He writes a weekly column that is carried in over 90 newspapers around the world. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Making a Difference

Tony Magliano

Pope Francis: the conscience for the world!

In a world that so often turns its back on those most in need, Pope Francis instead consistently exemplified Jesus' call to us to be his light in the darkness: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. ... Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father." That is exactly how Pope Francis lived!

He often made efforts to prick, and ever rattle our consciences to pay serious attention to our suffering brothers and sisters, and to our battered earth-home; focusing beams of Christ's light on those who are on the periphery – like so many vulnerable children, migrants, the homeless, the war-torn, the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly, and the unborn.

Pope Francis was consistent in his prophetic teaching on the protection of all life from conception to natural death. Starting with the earliest stages of life Pope Francis firmly declared, "Abortion is more than an issue. Abortion is murder." Each unborn baby is "a human life, period. ... Is it right, is it fair, to kill a human life to solve a problem?"

Always proclaiming peace and condemning war he challenged each of us to realise that "War is the suicide of humanity because it kills the heart and kills love." That "Wars are always madness: all is lost in war, all is gained in peace."

In his historic address to the U.S. Congress Pope Francis' boldly said "Why would anyone give weapons to people

who use them for war? . . . The answer is money, and the money is drenched in blood" (see: <https://bit.ly/3CaoOgp>).

Regarding his teaching on migrants, Pope Francis said, "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian."

And on the environment, Pope Francis' famous encyclical letter "*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*" speaks volumes (see: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

Pope Francis once poignantly asked, "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?"

When it became clear during the papal conclave that he would be the next pope, the archbishop from Argentina thought, "the poor, the poor." Then he said, "Thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were being counted." And he thought that "St Francis is also the man of peace." "That is how the name came into my heart."

And our dear Holy Father added, "For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation," and added that St. Francis was "the poor man who wanted a poor Church." Within that same spirit, Pope Francis beautifully said, "How I would love a Church that is poor and for the poor."



Pope Francis meets with recently arrived refugees from the Greek island of Lesbos at the Vatican December 19, 2019. The pope met 33 refugees and migrants who had arrived in Rome two weeks ago. (CNS photo/Stefano Dal Pozzolo)

The guiding light of the Risen Christ continues to shine brightly through Pope Francis, even now after his passing. His tireless teachings and examples of selfless loving service toward all – especially for the poor, vulnerable and our earth-home – will live on, continuing to do much good if we allow ourselves to actively live the Gospel he embodied.

During Pope St John Paul II's funeral Mass, you may remember banners proclaiming in Italian "Santo Subito!" – meaning "Make him a saint now!"

Similarly, how can we not be confident

that Pope Francis is with God? So, let's once again proclaim what the Holy Spirit is inspiring us to know: "Santo Subito!" Indeed, let's acknowledge him as a saint now. Let's pray for his intercession, and follow his saintly example as tireless missionary disciples of the Risen Lord Jesus!

Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net.

Little Catholics' corner

Use to code below to fill in the missing letter

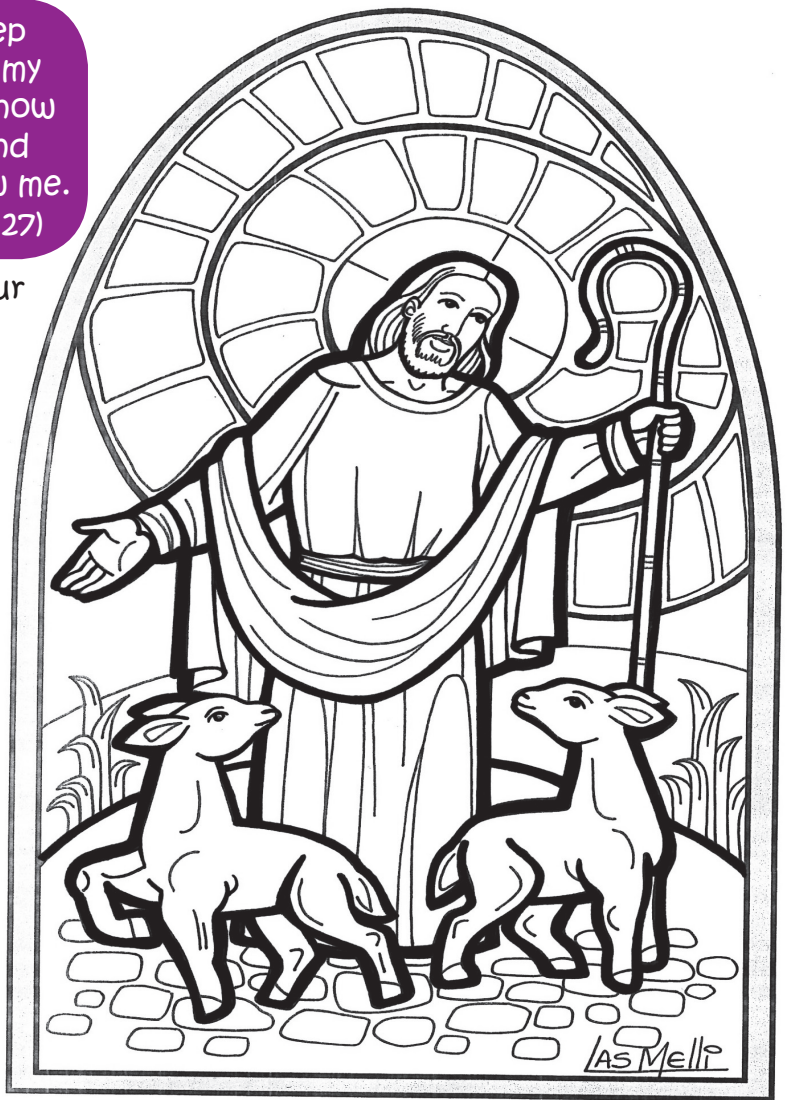
O=1 L=2 T=3 S=4 H=5

Sa²vati¹n
bel¹ng
³o our God,
w⁵o sit⁴ ¹n
t⁵e ³hrone,
and t¹ the
²amb. (Revelation 7:1)



My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

Let's Colour



4+4= 6-2= 5+4=

6+4= 9-2= 1+4=

3+3= 7-3= 2+8= 6-1=

4=A 5=E 6=G 7=H 8=I 9=M 10=T

What did Jesus say about the sheepfold? Figure out the math questions and then fill in the blanks with the letters the numbers represent.

Answer: I am the gate

The letters in squares fit into the spaces at the bottom.

GATEKEEPER	HIS	THIEF	
REALIZE	WILL	DRIVEN	
SPEECH	YOU	CLIMBS	
ENTERS	AMEN	VOICE	

Jesus said: "Amen, ¹² I say to ⁹ whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but ¹¹ over elsewhere is a ⁵ and a robber. But whoever ² through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The ¹ opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls ¹⁰ own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has ⁸ out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his ³. But they will not follow a stranger; they ⁴ run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Although Jesus used this figure of ⁷, the Pharisees did not ⁶ what he was trying to tell them.

answer: know his voice

The sheep 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Dear children,
The readings in today's Mass talk about Jesus the Good Shepherd. In Jesus' time, and still in some parts of the world today, there are flocks of sheep grazing in the pastures. The shepherds were the men who looked after the flocks and made sure none of the sheep got lost or hurt or attacked by wild animals. The Church is the flock of Jesus, and He is the Good Shepherd. He guides the people in the Church so that their souls will not be hungry. He gives us grace, just like a shepherd makes sure his sheep have lots of grass to eat! Like the shepherd protects the sheep from danger, Our Lord also protects us from harm. to deliver us from evil. When our souls are hurt by sin, the Good Shepherd heals us with forgiveness in Confession. Till we meet again, be good okay.

Love
Aunty Eliz

In the "Our Father" we ask God

YOUTH

Jennifer Duarte

POH: After completing their major school exams, many young people look forward to relaxing, having fun, or picking up a part-time job to earn some pocket money. However, six Form 5 school-leavers in Ipoh decided to take on a different kind of challenge - by joining the *Grow to Glow* programme, a two-month initiative conceived by Fr Aloysius Tan, parish priest of the Church of St Michael.

In the programme, the six participants, five boys and one girl, spent their weekdays at the parish from 9.00am to 4.00pm. They engaged in a variety of activities, including a personal development programme, a visit to an Orang Asli settlement, and even worked together to prepare lunch for the group on one occasion.

A major component of the programme was a five-day personal development programme facilitated by Martin Jalleh. It focused on both personal and interpersonal growth, as well as addressing common youth issues. Participant Fabian Yoon shared that the sessions inspired him to deepen his faith. He was especially moved by the film *Facing the Giants*, which reminded him of the importance of trusting in God.

One of the more memorable experiences was a visit to an Orang Asli settlement in Lenggong. Before the trip, participants helped pack essential supplies such as food and clothing. Due



to limited space in the four-wheel drive, only four of them could make the journey. Bernard recalled the drive up steep slopes as both dangerous and exhilarating. Once there, the group helped distribute items like biscuits, slippers, and clothes.

Aloysius Robinson described the visit as refreshing and eye-opening, appreciating the peace and beauty of the natural surroundings. Swimming in

crystal-clear waters made him feel truly connected with nature. Henrick, another participant, was saddened by the hardships the Orang Asli face — lack of electricity, insufficient food, and widespread health issues. He was grateful that a medical team accompanied them to address some of these needs.

Since the programme coincided with Lent, the par-

ticipants were also actively involved in the parish's Lenten activities. They collected donations from parishioners, shopped for food rations for the underprivileged, and took part in liturgical preparations such as burning old palm leaves for Ash Wednesday and selling hot cross buns on Holy Thursday. Choo Yue Wen, the sole female participant, particularly enjoyed the charitable shopping spree for the less fortunate.

They also attended a leadership course alongside other parish youths and students from Sam Tet Secondary School. This was conducted by Helena Michael, a certified trainer and lecturer from HELP University.

Another standout experience was a week-long visit to the Little Sisters of the Poor in Penang. "Besides mopping floors and serving meals, we learned how to engage with the elderly — even playing mahjong with them," shared Bryan Choong with a smile.

Over the two months, participants also explored the history of the Bible, learned about the diocesan Sahabat Orang Asli ministry, and even picked up soap-making skills.

Initially uncertain about what the programme entailed, the participants all agreed it far exceeded their expectations. Henrick summed it up best: "My time was definitely spent more meaningfully than if I had taken a part-time job."

The *Grow to Glow* programme offered a unique blend of intellectual, spiritual, and community formation. As Martin Jalleh noted, it was "an excellent experiential programme — informative, practical, relevant, and holistic." All six participants said they would wholeheartedly recommend it to their juniors in the years to come.



Teenagers bid farewell to the Pope of their youth

Throughout the service, her face remained solemn, her emotions contained. Elisabeth Plouvier, 15, who followed the funeral with her group along Via della Conciliazione, admitted she felt “chills” at the start of the Mass. She was “moved” when the pope’s closed coffin was carried to St. Peter’s Square. “It made my heart ache to know that the next time I come to Rome, it won’t be him speaking to us,” said the teenager, wearing a long skirt and purple sneakers. “I wanted to pray for him and the cardinals, asking God to help them choose the future pope.”

With the simultaneous Jubilee of Teenagers, which was expected to draw about 80,000 people, it was impossible to miss the crowd of young people, ages 13 to 18, along the long avenue lined with obelisk-shaped streetlights. Their presence, combined with the early wake-up call required to attend the funeral, gave the scene a World Youth Day vibe: a scramble to get into the Mass, young people asleep on the ground, sometimes wrapped in emergency blankets during the service, and T-shirts distinguishing them by their dioceses.

Grief and joy

Elisabeth, with her group from the Lisieux Pays d’Auge parish, wore navy blue sweat-shirts printed with a quote from Blessed

Carlo Acutis, who was set to be canonised on Sunday, April 27: “Never forget that you too can become saints.” She vividly remembers meeting the pope during a Rome-Assisi pilgrimage. “He took a picture with us and was happy to do it,” she recalled. “I’m very sad because I loved him a lot. But I’m happy to be here. I don’t quite know how to feel.” Kneeling or standing throughout the Mass, she was only occasionally distracted, responding to a companion or two.

Next to her, 13-year-old Aliénor Costere -

flects on the pope, beloved by young people: “It’s a bit strange, it reminds me of Jesus who died and gave Himself for us.”

‘The only pope we’ve known’

Pope Francis’ attention to youth, demonstrated repeatedly during his 12-year papacy, was clearly heard by those it was aimed at. His consistent concern for the poor, migrants, and the “cry of the Earth” contributed significantly to his popularity among them.

Sitting with several friends on



Pope Francis greets young people gathered in St. Peter’s Square for his Wednesday general audience on April 17, 2024, at the Vatican.

steps between the olive trees lining the avenue, Thomas Belanger, a ninth-grader, recalls his experience of the Lisbon World Youth Day (Portugal), which he followed on TV, too young to attend. He had already noticed the simplicity and closeness that the Argentine pope displayed toward the younger generations of Catholics. “His humility struck me; he even gave up the luxury of the Vatican apartments,” he said, admiringly.

Grégoire Brunet, 17, wearing a cream-colored cap to protect himself from the sun beating down on the Vatican, compares the pope’s funeral to those he has experienced in his own family. “It’s totally different because of the crowd,” he says, turning his head toward the avenue filled with people. “But the fervour makes me feel something powerful.” Most young French pilgrims express similar feelings of being overwhelmed by the scale of the event.

“We’ll be able to tell our children about this later,” added Grégoire Brunet. “It’s even stronger because we grew up with him. He’s the only pope we really knew.” In his view, “From Heaven, he must be very happy” to see young people coming to Rome for their Jubilee, despite his death. **Mathieu Lasserre, LCI** (<https://international.la-croix.com/>)

A Glimpse of Christ-like Love

It still feels surreal to me today, that 11 months ago, I was given the opportunity to meet Pope Francis and shake his hands through the International Youth Ministry Congress 2024. He looked similar to when I first saw him from a distance during World Youth Day 2023, he had a glow on his face which made me wonder if that’s how saints look like.

This time, I could see the same up close, holding his very soft hands (quite shyly), looking into his eyes that showed hints of excitement and curiosity as he met each delegate. Despite his weak body, he chose to enter the room that morning by walking, and the whole audience was so touched we stood up and applauded for him, cheering, “Esta es la juventud del papa”, which means “this is the youth of the Pope”. When he gave his address, he would look up from his script once in a while and say something funny to make us laugh. It touched me when he reminded us pastoral ministers to continue listening to the young people, in his words, “a real listening, not one that is ‘half-hearted’ or merely ‘window dressing’”.

From my encounters with Pope Francis, whether through this congress, his addresses or his encyclicals, I learned that he really loved the people. Through his own actions, he showed us a type of love that was inclusive and authentic, and that the Church has a place for everyone without them having to fit any type of “standards”, but to just come and be as they are. I am very grateful for the opportunity to encounter Pope Francis up close, and I pray that being touched by his Christ-like love, I continue to learn how to love others with compassion and humility as he did. **Karen Chan**



A Journey of Grace with Pope Francis



I will never forget the memories I shared with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, during his life on earth. Looking back, the first time I saw him in person was at World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland in 2016. I was filled with excitement, it was my first time seeing the Holy Father up close, even though he only passed by our area. The second time was at World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal in 2023, where once again, I saw him from a close distance as he passed by.

The third and most unforgettable encounter took place during the International Youth Ministry Congress in Vatican City in 2024. That moment was incredibly special — I had the chance to speak with him, shake his hand, and embrace him. It was a moment of grace I never imagined I would receive. I am deeply grateful to God for this profound blessing for allowing me to meet the Vicar of Christ.

In hindsight, the encounters at WYD 2016 and WYD 2023 seemed to be a preparation for that personal meeting in 2024. The joy I felt from experiencing God’s grace and goodness through these moments is beyond words. I believe Pope Francis is now in the loving arms of our Heavenly Father.

Thank you, Pope Francis, for being a model of humility and compassion. Rest in peace, beloved Holy Father. Your service and your goodness will live on in the hearts of all the faithful. Amen. **Roney Alfred**

A Humble Shepherd Who Walked With Us



With the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis on Easter Monday, April 21, 2025, the Catholic Church mourns a beloved shepherd. His death has stirred tributes from across the world — a testament to the profound legacy he left behind.

Amid this global outpour, I recall a grace-filled moment on September 27, 2023, during the Wednesday General Audience at St Peter’s Square. Alongside 15 other young communications professionals from around the world, I was blessed to meet His Holiness through the “Faith Communication in the Digital World” programme by the Dicastery for Communications.

Under the scorching Roman sun, we waited patiently as he made his rounds to greet group by group. I remember being struck by his resilience — at 86 years old, he had just returned from an Apostolic Journey to Marseille, France and was preparing for the Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals in the next few days, which included our own Cardinal Sebastian Francis. Despite his fatigue, the Holy Father pressed on — smiling, blessing and being fully present, all while guided in his wheelchair.

When he reached us, he spoke and laughed — not as a distant pontiff but more as a grandfather among grandchildren. Though we came from different nations and cultures, he welcomed each of us without distinction. He truly embodied the spirit of synodality in walking with, listening to, and embracing all. He prayed over us and, as he often did, asked us to pray for him too.

That brief encounter brought to life what I admired from afar, through screens and headlines. What moved me even more was how, despite his declining health, Pope Francis remained steadfast to the mission in leading, teaching and journeying with the Church.

Let us remember not only his words and actions, but strive to live by the example he set as a living witness of Christ. May his soul rest in the eternal peace of the Risen Lord, whose love he so faithfully reflected. **Shannon Wei**





World's oldest person, Sister Inah Canabarro Lucas, dies at 116

Sisters of Brazil, a community she joined in 1927 at age 19.

In a March 2024 interview with *ACI Digital*, *CNA's* Portuguese-language news partner, she mentioned that one of the secrets to her longevity was praying every day for all the people of the world.

Originally from São Francisco de Assis in Rio Grande do Sul state, Inah was the great-niece of Gen. David Canabarro, one of the main leaders of the Farroupilha Revolution (1835–1845) that took place in the same state. She studied at a convent school and at age 19 entered the novitiate with the Teresian Sisters in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Over the course of more than a century, she experienced numerous changes in the world and in the Church. The nun lived through two world wars and 10 popes. The year she was born, St Pius X was pope.

As a teaching sister, Inah taught Portuguese, mathematics, science, history, art, and religion in Teresian schools in Rio de Janeiro, Itaqui, and Santana do Livramento, a city where she is much loved because it was where she spent most of her life.

A notable achievement in her life was the creation of the Santa Teresa School marching band in Santana do Livramento. The band featured 115 musical instruments and performed in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. She also collaborated in the creation of the renowned Pomoli High School marching band in Rivera, Uruguay, sister city of Santana do Livramento.

With her death, the world's oldest person, according to LongeviQuest, becomes Englishwoman Ethel Caterham, who is 115 years old, born on Aug 21, 1909. **Natalia Zimbrão, CNA**

SAO PAULO, Brazil Sr Inah Canabarro Lucas, the oldest person in the world, died Wednesday in Porto Alegre, Brazil, at the age of 116.

Born on June 8, 1908, the Teresian nun was the oldest person in the world, according to LongeviQuest, a group of researchers that studies centenarians.

She lived in Porto Alegre, in the Santo Enrique de Ossó Shelter, located next to the provincial house of the Teresian

Church in Indonesia trains volunteers in dignified Catholic funeral care

INDONESIA: A Catholic parish in Central Java has organised a special training session to help Church volunteers properly care for the deceased, emphasising dignity, reverence, and spiritual support in line with Catholic teachings.

Held at St Paul's Church, Kleco Parish in collaboration with Brayat Minulyo Hospital Surakarta, the "Catholic-standard Funeral Care Training" gathered more than 90 participants, mostly parishioners, from 51 local communities.

The programme was organised under the Pangruktilaya Ministry Team, a local service dedicated to end-of-life ministry.

The term Pangruktilaya is a Javanese word that refers to the respectful care and preparation of a deceased person before their final rest.

The training aimed to provide both practical skills and spiritual context for volunteers involved in funeral care within the Church.

"Funeral care is a noble ministry," said Fr. Aloysius Kriswinarto MSF, chief parish priest, in his opening remarks. "Funeral care ministers assist the deceased by caring for and preparing them properly to meet the Lord."

The team from Brayat Minulyo Hospital, run by the Franciscan Sisters



Participants observe a hands-on demonstration of Catholic funeral care procedures during a training session at St Paul's Church, Kleco Parish in Surakarta. (LiCas News/FX Juli Pramana)

of OSF Semarang, guided participants in understanding the theological significance of death, highlighting Scripture passages such as "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21), and "Life is changed, not ended. And when our earthly dwelling falls, an eternal home in heaven is prepared for us."

The training also offered detailed instructions on Catholic funeral care, including respecting the wishes of the bereaved family, gathering information on the deceased's medical history, and providing both emotional and spiritual support.

Emphasis was placed on maintaining privacy, preserving dignity, and avoiding actions that may lead to gossip within the community.

Volunteers were advised to prepare

all necessary tools and wear appropriate protective gear such as gloves and masks.

The rite begins with prayer, and participants are encouraged to "communicate" with the deceased during the process — for example: "Please forgive us, Sir/Madam. You are going to meet God. Let us bathe and cleanse your body, so you are fresh, clean, and dressed properly to meet Him."

Participants also engaged in practical sessions. One attendee shared a useful tip: applying vinegar can help loosen stiffened muscles, especially in the legs.

The training concluded with a renewed commitment among participants to uphold dignity and reverence in their ministry to the dead, as an act of service to both the departed and their grieving families. **FX Juli Pramana, LiCas News**

MEMORIAM

For enquiries, please contact:
Email: memoriam@herald.com.my
Tel: 03-2026 8291

50th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of
Doreen Sumathi Joseph Packiam



Departed : 11th May 1975

50 years ago on this day you left all of us for your heavenly abode too soon, but your memory lives on in our hearts.

Mass will be offered on the 11th May 2025 (Sunday) at 9.30am at the Church of Visitation, Seremban.

Deeply missed and forever cherished by loved ones.

5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of

Dr. Loke Kong Poh, PhD.
7 March 1955 - 14 May 2020



"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life"
- John 3:16

Deeply missed and forever cherished by beloved wife, daughter, son-in-law, grandson, in laws, relatives, Karate mates/students, and friends.

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Seoul launches WYD 27 with green initiative

SEOUL: The Archdiocese of Seoul inaugurated its *Breathe Life into the Whole World* campaign on April 26 with a symbolic tree-planting event at Haneul Park, marking the first of several ecological initiatives in preparation for World Youth Day 2027.

Around 80 participants, including youth representatives, clergy, and volunteers, gathered on the southern slope of Sangam World Cup Park to plant 300 Cornelian cherry trees (*Cornus officinalis*), chosen for their early spring blossoms and carbon-absorbing properties.

Organisers described the activity as a “symbolic beginning” to a three-year ecological movement inspired by *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on environmental stewardship. The Pope had written, “An act as simple as planting a tree becomes a sign of hope for our planet and future generations” (LS, 211).

The campaign aims to promote sustainability, ecological awareness, and intergenerational solidarity. In collaboration with the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the Archdiocese plans to plant more than 10,000 trees through six events involving approximately 2,000 volunteers. The chosen venue, Haneul Park, is a reclaimed landfill turned ecological reserve, serving as a symbol of

renewal and care for creation.

World Youth Day, held every three years at the Pope’s invitation, is both a religious and cultural gathering for young people. Seoul’s selection as host for the 2027 event signals the city’s growing commitment to global conversations around youth engagement, peacebuilding, and climate action.

Two major activities are lined up as part of the WYD preparatory campaign:

On May 10–11, the youth festival “Hee-Hee-Hee,” themed *Light. Joy. Hope.* will be held in celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The event will feature a vocations-themed Mass and activities aligned with the Year of Consecrated Life, inviting young people to reflect on identity, purpose, and calling.

Then on May 24, a *May Crowning and Fellowship Night* will honour WYD volunteers. Bishop Paul Lee, General Coordinator of the Local Organising Committee, will join the gathering and share an informal evening of chicken and beer with volunteers as a gesture of gratitude.

The tree-planting campaign and upcoming events reflect the Church’s commitment to youth participation and ecological justice, as the global Catholic community prepares for World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul. **LiCAS News**



Volunteers plant Cornelian cherry trees on the southern slope of Haneul Park in Seoul on April 26, 2025, as part of the Archdiocese of Seoul’s “Breathe Life into the Whole World” campaign leading up to World Youth Day 2027. (LiCas News/Archdiocese of Seoul)

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Trump launches Religious Liberty Commission



Surrounded by faith leaders, US President Donald Trump signs an executive order on the “Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission” during the National Day of Prayer in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington May 1, 2025. (OSV News photo/Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters)

WASHINGTON: On May 1, President Donald Trump signed an executive order establishing a religious liberty commission during an interfaith event marking the National Day of Prayer at the White House Rose Garden. The commission will advise the White House Faith Office and Domestic Policy Council, focusing on preserving religious freedom, promoting pluralism, and addressing current challenges, including school choice and conscience protections.

Among those appointed are Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York and Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota. Trump remarked on Cardinal Dolan’s absence, noting he was in Rome preparing to vote in the upcoming papal conclave following Pope Francis’ death. “He was actually torn,” Trump said, adding humorously, “I said, ‘You can’t do that. This

is much more important.”

Bishop Barron expressed gratitude for the appointment in a post on X, stating he would bring the perspective of Catholic social teaching to the commission’s work. He cited the example of Fr Theodore Hesburgh, a longtime presidential advisor, and asked for prayers as he undertakes the role.

The commission will be chaired by Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and vice-chaired by Dr Ben Carson. Other members include Ryan Anderson, Rev Franklin Graham, Pastor Paula White, and TV personality Dr. Phil McGraw.

Trump framed the initiative as a defense of religious liberty “for people of all faiths, at home and abroad.” While acknowledging criticism from faith leaders on some policies, he emphasised his administration’s commitment to protecting religious expression. **OSV**

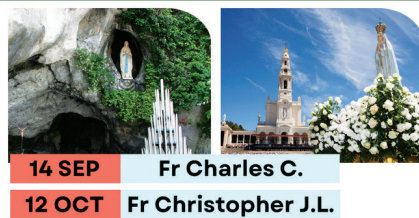
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