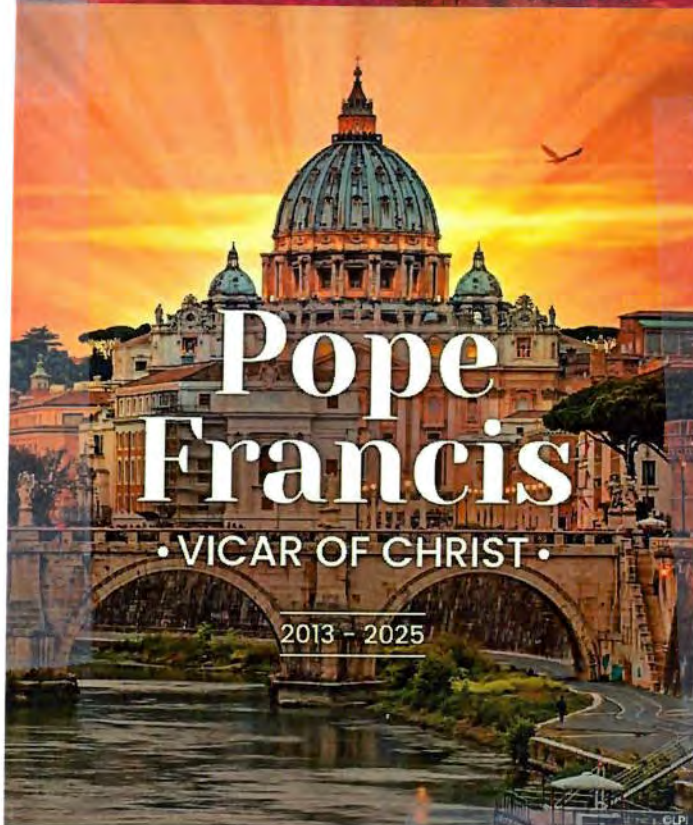




**MAY THE SOUL OF THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED
THROUGH the MERCY
of GOD, REST IN PEACE.**

"THIS IS WHAT I AM ASKING YOU:
BE SHEPHERDS WITH
THE SMELL OF SHEEP."



**STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP THOMAS WENSKI
ON THE DEATH OF POPE FRANCIS**

In *Evangelii Gaudium* ('Joy of the Gospel'), Pope Francis said: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its security.

Pope Francis saw the Church as a "field hospital" called to tend to the wounded on the battlefields of life, offering her medicine of mercy to all. The Church, Pope Francis insisted, is not only to teach but to act—to embrace those on the periphery and to bring the light of Christ to the darkest corners of society. Shortly after his election as Pope, his first visit outside of Rome was to the marooned African boat people washed ashore on the small Italian island of Lampedusa. He never tired of defending the displaced migrant nor embracing the marginalized or excluded, whether at a papal audience in St. Peter's Square or in a prison.

His legacy will be defined by a series of "firsts": the first Jesuit Pope, the first Pope from the Americas, the first Pope to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress, and the first Pope to appoint women to high positions in the Roman Curia previously held only by male prelates. We live, he said, not in an era of change but in the change of an era. Because scandals had undermined people's trust in society's institutions, whether political, academic, economical or religious, he defied the institutional "norms" of the Papal court: he carried his valise, refused to be chauffeured in limousines, and eschewed symbols of pomp and circumstance, living not in the Apostolic Palace but in a room at the Vatican's "hotel". In this way, he inspired many to give the Church a second look. And perhaps he was more highly regarded by those outside the Church than by many within the Church.

Nevertheless, his Pontificate was in continuity with those of his predecessors. If Pope Benedict XVI was the "green Pope" as the media called him for installing solar panels on the roofs of the Vatican, Pope Francis could claim to be the "greener Pope" for his landmark encyclical on creation care, *Laudato Si*. While studying as a young Jesuit in Germany, he became acquainted with a Bavarian Marian devotion represented by a Baroque painting depicting Mary as the Untier or Undoer of Knots. The concept of Mary untying knots is derived from a work by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies). In Book III, Chapter 22, he presents a parallel between Eve and Mary, describing how "... the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, thus did the Virgin Mary set free through faith." The then Father Bergoglio introduced this devotion to Argentina where it has spread in popularity throughout the Americas.

Pope Francis understood the many knots that bind us in the world today because of our "throw away culture" (*la cultura del descarte*) and the "globalization of indifference." A marble relief portrait over the gallery doors of the House Chamber in the U.S. Capitol depicts Moses. Referring to this iconic image when addressing the joint session, Pope Francis said: "The figure of Moses leads us directly to God and thus to the transcendent dignity of the human being. Moses provides us with a good synthesis of your work: you are asked to protect, by means of the law, the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face."

Pope Francis leaves this world as a "pilgrim o hope". "May choirs of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham; and where Lazarus is poor no longer may you find eternal rest." *And may Mary, Mother of the Church and undoer of knots, set us free through faith.*

Miami Shores, FL (April 21, 2025)