

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR POPE FRANCIS CHRIST THE KING CATHEDRAL

Thank you to each and every one of you for being with us this morning as we gather together to pray for Pope Francis and to give thanks to God for the blessings and graces that he has given to us through the late Pope. I would like to express my appreciation to the leaders of different Christian denominations and interfaith leaders, to leaders of civil society, for your presence, to representatives of government and different political parties. We appreciate the presence of all of you. Pope Francis belonged to all of us and not just the Catholic Church. I would also wish to apologise to members of the media who have sought interviews and information, that we have not been able to fulfil. Similarly, to those many, many people who have sent messages of condolence and to whom we have not been able to acknowledge. No disrespect has been intended, it is simply through being overwhelmed by the response and also our own need to make preparations for the days ahead.

Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio chose, as is the custom in the Catholic Church, chose the name of a saint by which he would be known in his papacy. He chose St Francis, the 12th-century saint, who is renowned for his life of poverty, his concern for the sick and the poor, and his sense of communion with creation, the entire universe. St Francis, in his poverty, expressed his utter trust and dependence on God and God's providence. These are indeed the characteristics of the papacy of Pope Francis, who from the outset expressed his concern and challenged the consciences of leaders of nations, champions of the economy, and ordinary citizens in their attitudes and behaviour towards the vulnerable of the world. His words were upheld by actions, many of them deeply symbolic. His first visit outside of the Vatican to Lampedusa showed his special empathy for the plight of refugees and migrants, the dangers they faced, their exploitation at the hands of smugglers and traffickers and the poor reception they received from countries to which they fled. His challenge to all countries to welcome, promote, accompany and integrate refugees has been a theme of his entire papacy since 2013. Sadly, there remains a great deal of discrimination against migrants; they continue to receive harsh treatment in many places and are easily made into scapegoats for the ills and woes of different countries and communities.

He frequently spoke of the needs of the marginalised, those at the peripheries of society. His call was to recognise the humanity of each person and not to judge or discriminate against others because of appearances or because of the struggles they may be going through. His willingness to confront thorny and controversial issues led some to distrust him, and they feared that he would change the doctrines and teachings of the Church, which have been handed on since the time of Christ. Francis never condoned sin, never intended to change what we believe as Christians and Catholics, but he appealed for compassion and charity. He had a deep sense of the imperfections,

frailty and sinfulness of mankind. On different occasions, he referred to himself as a sinner in need of prayer, showing both his sense of sin and his own need for redemption. Mercy was the heart of his teaching, and it is this that resonated with so many thousands of people throughout the world. He frequently spoke about the loneliness in which people live and the anonymity of life in the big cities. His message of mercy gave hope to many, since the world we live in is particularly harsh in this day and age, and those who feel themselves to be on the margins felt understood and accepted by him. His vision was of a pilgrim Church, of all of us journeying together towards God's Kingdom, and that our task was not to make the journey alone but to be with others, to accompany those struggling and not leave them behind, and to help carry each other's burdens.

He was probably the Pope to receive the most abuse in the modern era, sadly, very often from within the Church rather than from without. He was denigrated, told that he was a heretic or a populist, and called names that are not worth mentioning. This did not deter him. He continued to teach in words that everyone could understand, and which touched the hearts of those who listened. Despite the negativity, he remained always a person of joy – joy within himself and joy which he shared with others. The joy was often expressed in his sense of humour and his warm smile. One of the reasons for criticism was the synod on synodality, which some felt was a departure from the structures of the Catholic Church and an abdication of leadership. Critics neglected to acknowledge the need to listen to others, most especially to listen to the quiet voices, the voices of the “little people”. God's Spirit blows where he wills, and we, whether we are in leadership or not, cannot attempt to put limits on God's Holy Spirit. Listening to the Holy Spirit and others is one foot of the pot, discernment is the second, and the third foot of the pot is the understanding that we are all Church together – laity, consecrated persons, priests and bishops. We all share the mission of the Church entrusted to us by Christ.

His courage saw him through the negativity, including that of nations and governments who rejected his message of peace, his denunciation of war and conflict, and his appeal for dialogue and peace. The destruction of life truly disturbed, saddened and angered him. The arrogance of nations or groups which see their power in terms of their ability to destroy, maim and kill was obnoxious to him and against everything he believed and taught. He was not afraid to say so. Neither was he afraid to promote the care of our common home and the protection of the environment. He became increasingly critical of those countries which, through selfish and purely nationalistic reasons, were not taking the necessary steps to curb the environmental disaster facing the world. His voice was an encouragement to many and a nuisance to some.

There are many things we could say about Pope Francis. We should understand one thing very clearly, though. He was not simply an inspired world leader, nor was he a leader who was subject

to a particular ideology which he tried to promote. He wasn't merely a "do-gooder", a humanist. He was a person of faith, one who had a deep and unwavering trust in God and in God's goodness, his certainty of Christ's ultimate victory and the Kingdom of God. His prayer life and communion with God were the source of his strength, his wisdom, his gruelling work ethic. It was this that gave him such love for people, overflowing joy and the inner strength that made him determined to carry on his mission to the end, despite his failing health. He knew that he was a servant of God and, even though he gained much public acclaim, this was not important to him. He was wary of flattery and praise singers. His motivation was to serve God and God's Kingdom, and he knew he could not do that without serving the needs of people, especially the poorest, the vulnerable and those most neglected. It is this most especially that we should wish to emulate of his life - his deep belief and faith in God, his desire to gather people into God's Kingdom of justice, peace and unity, and to create a world that is more merciful and caring.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.