

Pope Francis Diocesan Memorial Mass

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

April 28, 2025

Since Pope Francis' death a week ago and through his globally televised Funeral Mass and Divine Mercy Sunday, I have been remembering so many of his memorable phrases.

“The smell of the sheep”

“A community of missionary disciples”

“The Church as Christ's combat field hospital”

“Break through global indifference”

“God's word is unpredictable in its power”

“The Church needs the deep breath of prayer”

“Mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel.”

“Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life”

“What would happen if we were to treat our Bible as we treat our mobile phone?”

“Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.”

And, perhaps the most pointed example of Pope Francis' provocative dry wit: “Have you ever seen a U-Haul behind a funeral hearse?”

These phrases reveal to us anew that the Holy Spirit has plowed our souls with the teaching of Pope Francis.

Those seeds sown by Pope Francis will continue to grow like the biblical mustard seed giving guidance and creativity to the mission of the Universal Church including the Church here on Long Island.

In St. Paul's second Letter to the Corinthians, he says to us: "You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh."

Pope Francis, like St. Peter and St. Paul, wants each of us to be that letter – that Good News of Jesus Christ written by the Holy Spirit.

We give thanks to the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Francis' unique graces and charisms and the compelling way during his Pontificate that he was a Light of Jesus Christ and an Apostle of the Mission of Mercy of the Catholic Church to the world.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis speaks about the original freshness of the Gospel: "Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always 'new.'" (11)

It is this "original freshness of the Gospel" captured in Luke 5 with the bursting fishing nets of Peter, James and John that sets us on our 21st century course as we "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!"

Think of how Pope Francis so often brought us back to and launched us forward to this "original freshness of the Gospel."

His love of Pope St. Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) resulted in a fresh and compelling presentation of the Catholic Church's global missiology in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013).

In *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Pope Francis focused on the "Art and Architecture of Peace" (228) whether that means peace between nations or whether it means peace between family members.

He said that to build that Art and Architecture of Peace we must focus on the interdependence of truth, justice and mercy. (227)

And there is no true mercy without objective moral truth and justice.

Pope Francis echoed his immediate predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI's warning about the catastrophic impact of a "dictatorship of relativism" when he stated at the United Nations on September 25, 2015: "The defense of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 155), and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions (cf. *ibid.*, 123, 136)."

He pointed out the self-destructive presuppositions of gender ideology¹ as a particularly destructive expression of the dictatorship of relativism. He referred to the coercive imposition of gender ideology on developing nations as "ideological colonization."

It is time for us all to join with Pope Francis and his successor in rejecting the Culture of Death and Darkness and in embracing the Culture of Life and Light.

It is time for us to embrace a Civilization of Love.

It is time for us, like Pope Francis, to always put God first.

In his visitation to the Ground Zero Memorial in lower Manhattan and as he reached out to our ecumenical and interfaith brothers and sisters, Pope Francis said: "In the depths of pain and suffering, you also witnessed the heights of generosity and service. Hands reached out, lives were given...This place of death became a place of life too, a place of saved lives, a hymn to the triumph of life over the prophets of destruction and death, to goodness over evil, to reconciliation and unity over hatred and division."

In his *Address to the U.S. Congress* in September 2015, Pope Francis appealed directly to American history by citing the enduring inspiration of such towering figures as Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), Thomas Merton (1915-1968) and Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and the unique

¹ See: 1) Congregation for Catholic Education's "Male and Female He Created Them: Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education," February 2, 2019; 2) Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Declaration 'Dignitatis Infinita' on Human Dignity*, 55-60.

freshness of the Gospel they brought to the American experience and to the entire world.

At the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and on the campus of the Catholic University of America in our Nation's Capital, Pope Francis canonized the California missionary priest, Fr. Juniper Serra (1713-1784) and identified him "as the embodiment of 'a Church which goes forth.'"

At the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, he expressed his love for immigrant and refugee families, and he always reminded us that the Holy Family was a refugee family.

With Philadelphia's Independence Hall in the background, Pope Francis said these inspiring and encouraging words to the Hispanic Catholic community in the United States, words he says to our treasured Long Island Hispanic community in this Easter season:

"No se desanimen por las dificultades que tengan que afrontar. Les pido que no olviden que, al igual que los que llegaron aquí antes, ustedes traen muchos dones a esta nación. Por favor, no se avergüencen nunca de sus tradiciones. No olviden las lecciones que aprendieron de sus mayores, y que pueden enriquecer la vida de esta tierra americana. Repito, no se avergüencen de aquello que es parte esencial de ustedes. También están llamados a ser ciudadanos responsables y a contribuir –como lo hicieron con tanta fortaleza los que vinieron antes-, a contribuir provechosamente a la vida de las comunidades en que viven. Pienso, en particular, en la vibrante fe que muchos de ustedes poseen, en el profundo sentido de la vida familiar y los demás valores que han heredado. Al contribuir con sus dones, no solo encontrarán su lugar aquí, sino que ayudarán a renovar la sociedad desde dentro."²

² **English Translation:** "Do not be discouraged by whatever hardships you face. I ask you not to forget that, like those who came here before you, you bring many gifts to this nation. Please, you should never be ashamed of your traditions. Do not forget the lessons you learned from your elders, which are something you can bring to enrich the life of this American land. I repeat, do not be ashamed of what is part of you, your life blood. You are also called to be responsible citizens, and to contribute fruitfully – as those who came before you did with such fortitude – to the life of the communities in which you live. I think in particular of the vibrant faith which so many of you possess, the deep sense of family life and all those other values which you have inherited. By contributing your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help to renew society from within."

Pope Francis encouraged all of our families by saying that “families transform the world and history” and he showed us in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) Jesus’ presence to a wide range of families (21) in the Gospels with the key message being that he is present to our families as well at every moment and in every season.

His passion for the great “Atlas” of the Catholic Church, St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), and the saint’s spirit of universal fraternity in the human family expressed in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) and St. Francis’ love for nature expressed in a Catholic integral ecology in *Laudato Si’* (2015) brought us back to “the original freshness of the Gospel.”

In *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), Pope Francis’ fresh meditation on our Lord’s Beatitudes, he reminded us that the Lord “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (1) and he pointed to the non-canonized “saints next door” (6-9) who light up our daily existences and the universe with their humble holiness.

His presentation of soon-to-be teenage Saint Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) to the young people of the world in *Christus Vivit* (2019) reminded us all to be baptismal originals who respond to our unique call to holiness rather than to be bland photocopies who follow the cynical and tired logic of the seven deadly sins. (104-106)

Pope Francis’ calling of a *Year of St. Joseph* and his meditation in *Patris Corde* (2020) on St. Joseph’s role in Salvation history as the patron of the Universal Church resulted in a dynamic re-presentation of the Church’s theology and spirituality of daily work as a means of sanctification.

In his *Synod on Synodality*, he brought us back to the Acts of the Apostles calling us, in communion and mission, to listen together to the Holy Spirit guiding us into the future in our fidelity to the Deposit of Faith and the unity and harmony of truth.

In *Desiderio Desideravi* (2022), Pope Francis reminded us in a striking way of the relationship between Biblical Divine Worship in the Seven Sacraments, Catholic evangelization and our Catholic Social Justice and Gospel of Human Life teaching.

In *C'est La Confiance* (2023) on the Doctor of the Church, St. Terese of Lisieux (1873-1897), he spoke of the wild-fire evangelizing influence of her *Story of a Soul* and the moments of missionary “grace experienced amid the simplicity of daily life.” (37)

He emphasized in *Dilexit Nos* (2024) that a biblical devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus – witnessed in history by the saints -- is a “synthesis of the Gospel.” (83)

With the fresh spirit of a bold prophet, Pope Francis, in *Antiqua et Nova* (2025), drew on the depth and history of the objective truths of Catholic moral teaching to show both the hope and possibilities presented by the evolution of Artificial Intelligence as well as the grave dangers of an Artificial Intelligence that ignores moral truth.

This section of *Evangelii Gaudium* captures, I believe, Pope Francis’ passionate love for the Church and the world and it will continue to inspire us as the Holy Spirit leads us further into the 21st century: “How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel...I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples.” (261)

Tonight, we pray for the soul of Pope Francis, we pray for the College of Cardinals which will elect his successor, and we pray for that successor who himself will be the 267th Vicar of Christ, the Risen Lord.