

The Humility of Pope Francis

Memorial Mass for Pope Francis

May 1, 2025

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This past weekend, which was the feast of Divine Mercy, we reflected on the ministry and life of Pope Francis from the perspective of mercy. Today, for this second homily on Pope Francis for this Evening of Remembrance, I would like to reflect upon his ministry and life from another significant perspective, that of his humility. I think that is what attracted so many people to him– not necessarily his stances on issues, but the fact that he was humble.

Before calling attention to examples of his humility this evening, I would like to connect all of them to this evening's Gospel passage when Jesus, speaking about being invited to a banquet, said, "when you are invited, go and take the lowest place." That was Pope Francis. Instead of taking the highest place in the Church through ambition, including the papacy, he took the lowest place. As he ascended in the Church hierarchy, he stayed humble and never credited his promotions to his own accomplishments, but always to the one who 'looked at him with mercy and chose him,' which was his motto as pope coming from the writing of the Venerable St. Bede in his reflection on the calling of St. Matthew.

Here are some concrete examples of his humility:

1) Choosing the name Francis: Despite being one of the most well-known saint names in history, no pope has ever chosen the name Francis. St. Francis of Assisi was known for giving up his inherited wealth and starting a religious order based entirely on humility. They were to call themselves 'minor brothers' and live in poverty.

2) Taking Public Transportation: Shortly after being elected pope on March 13, 2013, a picture emerged of him as Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio in the newspapers with his black priest collar on taking public transportation. This showed the world that even as the cardinal-archbishop of Buenos Aires, he did not see himself as better than the average person.

3) Simplifying the papal wardrobe: Before he spoke his first words on the day of his election, his simplicity of papal dress was already noticeable. Instead of wearing extra papal accessories, he wore what he would wear everyday for the next twelve years as pope, a white cassock. He was also rarely seen with excessive gold on him. He preferred his silver pectoral cross and even said a mass at Lampedusa with wooden furnishings, all taken from shipwrecks involving migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea, an issue close to his heart. Just a few weeks ago, he was also seen inside St. Peter

Basilica in his wheelchair going to pray at one of the side altars with no papal apparel!

4) Bypassing his Personal Security: Pope Francis told the bishops of the world that they had to be close to their people and have 'the smell of the sheep' on them. As a public figure, his own security detail could have prevented him from practicing what he preached. In many of his public appearances and travels, however, he wasn't afraid to remove the bullet proof glass from his popemobile, roll down the windows so people could come up to his car, or even take sips of Yerba mate offered to him by his admirers. He took these risks to his own security because he believed in the human dignity of all, not just his own.

5) Looking to the peripheries: Pope Francis introduced the term 'going to the peripheries' into common theological vocabulary. Instead of staying in the center of the Church, which many of us expect a pope to do, he associated himself with a broad range of people, especially those on the margins. In these days leading up to the Conclave to select the next pope, it is noteworthy to consider how Pope Francis reshaped the college of Cardinals by going to the peripheries. During his pontificate, he appointed cardinals from places that never had one before or who were not archbishops of the major cities of power in the world. At this conclave, there will be cardinals voting for the first time ever in a

papal election from Haiti, Rwanda, and Laos. There will also be the first African American cardinal ever voting in a conclave.

6) Listening at the Synod: In October 2023 and October 2024, Pope Francis called together a Synod on Synodality to discuss how we can be a church that listens and walks together. For the first time in centuries, he invited more people to participate than just the bishops. Even though he was the convener and final authority of the Synod, he took a seat at a round table just like every other participant. At the end of the synod, instead of issuing his own summary document of what happened, he immediately signed off on the document produced by the synod delegates and added his voice to the collective 'we' of the Church.

These are just a few of the many examples of the humility of Pope Francis. What are your memories of Pope Francis? How has he made you more humble?

Then Jesus said, "when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." That parable reminds us of Pope Francis. May he receive his repayment in the final resurrection of the righteous on the last day.