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## **From the periphery to the heart of the world. Francis and his final journey**

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On Easter Monday 2025, the world received the news of Pope Francis' death. Cardinal Kevin Farrell announced it with the following words: "The Bishop of Rome has returned to the Father's House." This biblical metaphor, instantly echoed by the global media, marked the beginning of a week of mourning during which millions bid farewell to the "pope from the end of the world."

From the outset of his pontificate, Francis—who took the name of the Poor Man of Assisi – consistently shaped the image of a close and humble shepherd. The media portrayed him as a pope who renounced pomp and formality, choosing a lifestyle rooted in simplicity and a direct connection with people. His concern for the excluded and voiceless was a constant feature of his ministry. His message and gestures were permeated by themes of mercy, social justice, and spiritual closeness to those who suffer the most in life.

The timing of his passing – during a liturgical season that celebrates life's triumph over death – was seen as deeply symbolic. His funeral coincided with a day dear to his spirituality and emphasised the continuity of his message. His final public acts, remembered by many, confirmed his unwavering fidelity to the path he had chosen. He was a shepherd who never stopped walking with his people – both in joy and sorrow.

Francis was often referred to as a pope close to the people and a voice for those who are often overlooked. In his speeches and actions, he appeared less as a ruler and more as a disciple of the Gospel. His pontificate symbolised unity rather than division; he dedicated himself to building bridges: between religions, social groups and between human conscience and institutional authority. He emphasised the importance of dialogue and the need to listen, especially in a world fractured by conflict, inequality, and misinformation.

Reports on his funeral highlighted both the wide international presence and the simplicity of the ceremony. The image of mourners – from global leaders to the most vulnerable – became a poignant reflection of his life and mission. The farewell offered by those to whom he had dedicated his attention was a powerful testament to his legacy. The sense of loss was shared not only by Catholics but also by people of other faiths and even non-believers, many of whom saw in him a genuine prophet for our times.

Francis – often called the “pope of surprises” – was unafraid to address difficult issues and remained open to dialogue. He preached a message of tenderness, courage, and community. He reminded the world that no one is saved alone. He spoke often of solidarity, ecumenism, and care for creation. His teachings shaped an image of the Church as one that listens, remains present on the existential peripheries, and engages deeply with the challenges of the contemporary world.

He left behind a Church that was not enclosed in ritual formalism, but attuned to the real concerns of modern life. Instead of an institution distanced from everyday reality, he proposed a community that accompanies people in both joy and hardship. His teaching continues to inspire efforts towards a more fraternal, sustainable, and open world.

The place of his burial, chosen during his lifetime, reflected his values and sensitivity – simple, modest, and linked to those on the margins of society. Rather than grand forms or symbols, his grave speaks in silence and humility. The inscription bears only one word: Franciscus. Thus ends a pontificate which – as many commentators agreed – “began with a blessing and ended with a blessing.”