

Pope Francis Obituary

Born on 17 December 1936 in Argentina, Pope Francis had a unique vision for the Church, one that will be remembered as reaching out to the marginalised and those who fight for recognition in a world that essentially treats them as invisible.

Francis was first and foremost an evangelist who led by example. Christians must awake, because for Francis the term marginalised was not attributable to any one body of people, and as his ministry unfolded, his approach became apparent to the eyes of the world. His initial appeal to the first of these 'invisible' bodies welcomed the poor and the homeless to the very gates of the Vatican itself where, coincidentally, the world's press were waiting. His determination and resolve to highlight the urgency of the message thereby, through the press, reached 'to the very ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8.)

It was a witness that could not be ignored and would become the cornerstone of his papacy. Under the watchful gaze of the world by now, Francis reached out to yet another invisible body but one that has consistently been forgotten in the history of the Church. He looked not to Europe nor to the West in general for the creation of new Cardinals, but rather to the hereto unrecognised and ignored Pacific countries and islands. In this way could the Church be truthfully recognised as global, fulfilling Christ's directive to take the Word to the ends of the Earth, encompassing all traditions and cultures while sealing the importance of their recognition.

One contentious issue for many in the Church today is the representation of women in roles of authority within the authority structures of the Church. To this end, he announced the appointment of three lay women (two from religious orders and one from wider society) to the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops. Such hoped-for appointments demonstrate a vision of outstanding bravery and commitment toward a broader understanding of the term 'marginalised'. Through his call for a more synodal Church, Pope Francis wishes to enable every member of the Church to have a real say in the running of the Church.

This last phrase is perhaps the most important of all, as Francis is the only Pope to acknowledge that, as a species, we are currently living in the middle of an ELE (extinction level event). Indeed, he has declared climate change to be the single biggest issue of our time, facing not only the body of the faithful but all strata of society around the world. Once again it is the marginalised who are suffering – the poorest countries with the poorest infrastructure. Francis described the world as our common home. He appealed to every human on the planet that each has a shared responsibility, both individually and collectively, to fight the degradation of our world.

Pope Francis will surely be remembered as a man of the people. However, to the body of the Faithful he was, and is, considerably more than that. He was the emissary for the poor, marginalised and disaffected, like the saint whose name he adopted. He gave them a voice and hopefully to the rest of us he gave an opportunity bound with bravery and self-sacrifice.