

HARRISBURG, Pa. – The Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior, Bishop of Harrisburg, released the following message on the passing of Pope Francis:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today in the sure and certain hope that we have in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we join with the Universal Church in mourning the death of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. It is profoundly significant that the Holy Father died as the Church rejoices in the Easter Mystery. In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has encouraged us to have hope in all circumstances – the hope that will not disappoint. At the same time, the Holy Father's passing leaves a void in the hearts of millions around the world who were touched by his unwavering faith, compassion and commitment to justice. As we continue our Easter observances, we are reminded that death is not the end, but a passage to everlasting life.

Pope Francis was a shepherd who led us with humility and grace. He reminded us constantly of the importance of mercy and the power of love in our daily lives. His words were not mere rhetoric; they were a call to action. Through his encyclicals, such as *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis urged us to care for our common home and to be stewards of creation. He ignited a global movement to foster environmental justice, reminding us that the care of our planet is a moral obligation.

In his papacy, Pope Francis broke down barriers and reached out to those on the margins of society. One of the most significant aspects of his papacy was his focus on the marginalized and the forgotten. Upon his election in 2013 as Pope, he chose the name Francis, in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, as a reminder that the poor should never be forgotten and to express his desire to live simply and to be a catalyst for renewal in the Church. He consistently reminded us that the Church must be a place of welcome and inclusion. His heartfelt gestures, such as washing the feet of prisoners and visiting the sick, exemplified his belief in the dignity of every person. Pope Francis challenged us to look beyond our comfort zones and reach out to those who are suffering, urging us to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. Even on his deathbed, until his strength gave out, every evening he spoke with the pastor and parishioners of The Church of the Holy Family in Gaza to inquire how they were doing and offer prayers and his blessing.

I had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis when he came to Philadelphia for the *World Meeting of Families* in 2015. At that time, we were privileged to host the Holy Father at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary where I was serving as Rector. Throughout his visit, Pope Francis exemplified the qualities which characterized his Pontificate in ways that were especially significant for our seminarians in formation for the Priesthood. Together with the other bishops of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, I met Pope Francis again on Thanksgiving Day in 2019, when we were in Rome for the *Ad Limina* visit. At the beginning of our meeting with him, the Holy Father told us that he would spend as much time as we needed speaking with us. As a true brother bishop, in a spirit of fraternity, he responded to our questions and listened to our concerns. It was clear that he was very much aware of our particular challenges at that time in Pennsylvania. As a bishop, I have been consistently inspired and encouraged in my own ministry by the words and

example of Pope Francis, and I remain deeply grateful for his appointment of me as the Bishop of Harrisburg in 2023.

As we reflect on his life and legacy, most especially during this Easter season, we can take to heart the lessons Pope Francis imparted. May we continue to strive to be a Church that is poor and for the poor, a Church that listens, a Church that embraces and uplifts those who are hurting. In our own communities, we are called to be agents of change, advocates for the voiceless, and messengers of hope.

While we grieve the loss of Pope Francis, we celebrate the great impact he had on our lives and the world. His vision of a more compassionate and just society will continue to inspire us as we carry forward his mission. We can honor his memory best by living out the values he espoused: love, mercy, and a commitment to the common good, and, especially in this Jubilee Year 2025, to be *"Pilgrims of Hope"* together.

I ask that all parishes of the Diocese of Harrisburg pray for and offer a Mass for Pope Francis, and that all my brother priests, deacons, seminarians and deacon candidates, consecrated religious and lay faithful, together with all the students in our elementary and secondary schools, pray for the repose of the soul of Pope Francis. I will be offering a Diocesan Mass at 7 p.m. today, April 21, at Saint Patrick Cathedral for the repose of the soul of the deceased Pope. All are invited to join me.

One of Pope Francis' last gifts to the Church is this Jubilee Year of Hope. He once said: "Through the Cross of Christ the Evil One is overcome, death is defeated, life is given to us, hope is restored. This is important: through the Cross of Christ hope is restored to us (Angelus, September 14, 2014)." May God grant Pope Francis eternal rest, a merciful judgment, and may we be empowered by his legacy to continue being witnesses of faith, hope, and love in our world.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior

Bishop of Harrisburg