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Remembering Pope Francis

Two UNIV participants, Daniel Marcinak and Matthew Moskowski, recall what a blessing it was being with Pope Francis during his final Easter.

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By **Daniel Marcinak and Matthew Moskowski**

It was a tremendous blessing to be present at UNIV this year for Pope Francis' last Easter. His pontificate was marked by an incredible spirit of

service, compassion, reconciliation, world peace, being among the people, simplicity, humility, and hope—all of which stemmed from an intense personal encounter with God’s tremendous mercy and love.

I remember at UNIV last year how moved I was to watch Pope Francis walk across the stage during the Papal Audience, when he had seemed virtually immobile at the Palm Sunday Mass only a few days prior, and I recall having left Rome that year thinking it would be the last time I saw the Holy Father. And yet how he carried on, and with such fervor!

How fitting it was that—in the very Jubilee of Hope which he had declared—Pope Francis provided such an incredible witness to hope amid all the suffering he endured in the last year, a hope which “perseveres in the midst of trials:

founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life” (*Spes non Confundit*, 3). One could say that he endured a prolonged Lent in which he intimately encountered Our Lord in His Passion, at last taking his rest during the very celebration of Christ’s triumphant Resurrection.

In his last days the Pope made every effort—despite his weak condition—to be with the people, from greeting and blessing those who attended the Palm Sunday Mass, to visiting the imprisoned on Holy Thursday, to meeting with the Vice President of the United States, and at last giving his final blessing at the *Urbi et Orbi* on Easter Sunday, which we were so privileged to attend. At our get-together with Don Mariano, we were told how difficult it was for the Pope even to physically smile given his exhaustion, and yet one could no less sense an incredible joy in him. Even

his words to his physician following the Urbi et Orbi Blessing expressed this same tremendous spirit of service and love: “Thank you for bringing me back to the square.” Truly, his last days on this earth consummated the resounding motif of his pontificate: to walk together with the People of God as the servant of servants.

Some may wonder how, in God’s Providence, He would permit the Pope to die during the Octave of Easter, prompting great mourning when there ought to be joy. And yet, there is nothing more Christian than for the most sorrowful of occasions to be simultaneous with the most joyful; it is precisely Christ’s Resurrection that—even amid the Sorrow of His Passion—gives comfort to those who mourn. (Mt. 5:4)

Indeed, there are many uncertainties which may assail our lives: war, persecution, disease, social unrest,

and even now some look with great anxiety towards the next Pope and the future of the Church. Yet the Christian message of Hope which Pope Francis emphasized gives us great reassurance. In this way he was truly a Pope for our time, exhorting us to the hope which ought to suffuse our entire lives, one which does not find its source in the fleeting circumstances of this world, but in the eager anticipation of the promised life in the next and trust in God's fatherly concern for us.

I end by recalling fondly the story of St. Josemaria who, upon first arriving to Rome in 1946, spent all night praying for the Pope on the balcony of the apartment that they had rented, despite his diabetes and exhaustion from travel. St. Josemaria had an intense affection for the Pope, and recognized how much the Pope needed our support and prayers as the Vicar of Christ on earth. If we

truly love Christ, we cannot help but love His Vicar who has been entrusted to us as our father and shepherd. Even if we cannot see the Holy Father, even if we are in distant lands thousands of leagues away from him, we may always be close to him, uniting ourselves to him in our prayer and in the little sacrifices of each day.

May all the Christian faithful be united—now more than ever—in our prayers for the repose of Pope Francis’ soul, the election of the next Pope, and the future of Holy Mother Church, all with a great joy and peace founded on hope. May we all echo that same sentiment of St. Josemaria: “Thank you, my God, for that love for the Pope you have placed in my heart.” (*The Way*, 573)

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