

## STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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**Easter continues!** On Easter Monday, just hours after the Christian world celebrated the Resurrection of our Savior; the whisper of God was directed to the heart of a shepherd of souls – a humble co-worker in the Lord’s vineyard – a minister, who shared God’s mercy and love to countless people from around the globe – and at his home at the Vatican, God called for His servant to return to Him. Jorge Maria Bergoglio, who since March 2013 has been known to the world as Pope Francis, answered the Heavenly Father’s call, and slipped into eternity.

Easter continues for us here on earth. Easter continues and will never end for our late Holy Father. We give thanks and praise to God for the gifts of love, mercy, compassion, and hope the Pope gave every day of his papacy to the entire human family. No one was excluded; Pope Francis saw everyone as a child of God – an irreplaceable gift of life – a precious reflection of Jesus Christ, who he served as a priest and bishop for over 55 years. For this and many more blessings from his ministry to the Catholic Church and the world, we are profoundly grateful.

Pope Francis was a gift to the Church, and during this Easter season, in particular in the midst of the Jubilee of Hope that the Pope inaugurated last December, we must turn our hearts, minds, and lips toward prayerful hope. Mortal death is not the end of life’s journey – Jesus proved this again on Easter Sunday. Christians are people of hope. Yes, we are an Easter people. Therefore, we will turn to prayer; first, thanking God for Pope Francis and commending his soul to His tender mercy; and then turning to the Holy Spirit, that He will guide the College of Cardinals in the election of the next Successor of Saint Peter. Our Easter hope continues – our prayer continues that will guide us in the days and weeks ahead.

For the past 12 years of my priesthood, I have prayed for Pope Francis every day at Mass in, what the Catholic liturgy calls the Eucharistic Prayer. Now his name will no longer be mentioned there – soon to be replaced with the name of the new Bishop of Rome, whoever God will send us. Pope Francis is the third pope in my lifetime and like John Paul II and Benedict XVI, I will pray that his soul will be safely ushered into the magnificence of seeing God face to face.

On the morning of April 21, many members of the Church had already prayed when news began to circulate of the Pope’s death. In the official prayer of the Church that priests and women religious are obligated to pray every day, the morning prayer of April 21 read in part, ***“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!”*** I have absolute certainty that, although in these past months Pope Francis had endured countless suffering as he carried the Cross of Christ, in the last moments of his earthly life, Pope Francis *prayed* these words – he *heard* these words – he *believed* these words!

May eternal rest, eternal peace, and eternal life be Pope Francis’ well-deserved reward. As Jesus reminds us in the Gospels, and so we make them our prayer for the Holy Father this week: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant.”***