

A legacy of humility & advocacy for social, economic, climate justice

FR. JOHN FELIX RAJ

Pope Francis has been a transformative leader since his election in 2013, bringing a fresh perspective to the papacy. Born Jorge Mario Bergardo, he chose his papal name in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi, known for his humility, simplicity and dedication to rebuilding the Catholic Church.

Unique leadership style

From the outset, Pope Francis embodied the qualities of great religious leaders, including Saint Peter

● Fr Felix Raj, SJ, is the vice-chancellor of St Xavier's University, Kolkata

and Saint Paul. His humility and sense of humour were evident when he told the cardinals who elected him, "May God forgive you for what you have done".

Breaking with tradition, Francis opted for a simple white cassock and cross instead of formal papal attire. He also chose to ride a bus with the cardinals and pay his hotel bill, setting a tone for a more humble and servant-like papacy.

Fresh perspective

As the first Jesuit Pope, the first from the Americas and the first from the southern hemisphere, Pope Francis brought a distinct perspective to the role. He was a vocal advocate for social jus-

tice, particularly regarding poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. His commitment to interfaith dialogue promoted greater understanding and cooperation between different religions.

Advocacy & reform

Pope Francis was a strong critic of economic injustice, speaking out against the exploitation of the poor and the environment. He highlighted the way the poor were treated in the world, the way the planet was exploited and the way the poor bore the main cost of the ecological crisis.

In 2019, he travelled to the United Arab Emirates, where he presided over a historic Mass on the Arabian Peninsula and addressed

pressing global issues, including migration and climate change.

He reignited his influence as a global environmental leader with the release of his impassioned 94-page *Apostolic Exhortation Querida Amazonia* (Dear Amazon) on February 2, 2020. This document addressed the fate of the Amazon biome and its indigenous people, who faced deforestation, illegal logging, mining, ranching and agribusiness in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Brazil.

Despite facing criticism and controversy, particularly regarding his handling of clergy sexual abuse cases and his *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*,

Pope Francis remained committed to reform and renewal within the Church.

Vision for the Church

Pope Francis marked 12 years of his Petrine ministry on March 13, 2025. During his papacy, a deeper understanding and appreciation of his leadership and his place in the larger context of contemporary Catholicism came into view. There was a widespread recognition that he had revived the vision of Vatican II for the Catholic Church. Consequently, his leadership was attentive to contemporary concerns of the Church and the world, such as migration, refugees, economy of exclusion, climate change, and marriage and family.

Dialogue, inclusivity

Pope Francis saw the importance of dialogue with religions, Churches, science and society for the common good.

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Mass, prayers for Pope Francis

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: The Roman Catholic churches will conduct prayers and a mass will be held for the repose of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, every day till his funeral, the archbishop of Calcutta, Reverend Thomas D'Souza, said on Monday evening.

"There will be prayers in all the churches. We have mass daily, and this mass will be specially offered for the repose of Pope Francis. It will begin on Tuesday and continue till the funeral," the archbishop told Metro.

"When the news came of the passing of our dear, loving Holy Father Pope Francis, I felt sad. Here was a loving Pope who loved people, and people loved him, because he was a pastor," the archbishop said.

The archbishop spoke about the Pope's reaching out to the poor, marginalised, and refugees, and his contribution to inter-religious dialogue.

"He worked towards bringing peace to the world. He was not hesitant to condemn conflicts or violence in any part of the world. He was a moral force not only within the church, but also for the world," the archbishop said.

Earlier in the day, the archdiocese of Calcutta issued a statement.

"It is with deep sorrow and profound respect that we, the clergy, religious, and faithful of the Archdiocese of Calcutta, mourn the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. As our supreme pontiff and spiritual father, Pope Francis was a beacon of compassion, humility and unwavering commitment to justice, peace and the Gospel of Christ," said Father Dominic Gomes, vicar general of the archdiocese of Calcutta.

"On behalf of His Grace, the Archbishop, and the entire Archdiocese, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the global Catholic community... and will those who were touched by the Holy Father's extraordinary life, vision and mission," the vicar general said.

The Catholic Association of Bengal conducted a prayer at St Thomas' Church, Middleton Row, on Monday evening.



A picture of Pope Francis displayed at the Basilica of San Jose de Flores in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Monday. (Reuters)