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Remembering Pope Francis

Fr. Joe Lopez, Rector of St Joseph's Church(Victoria Street), recounts personal meetings with Pope Francis in Rome and Singapore, offering insights into the late Pope's humility, kindness, and lasting spiritual influence.

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Pope Francis dedicated his life to serving God and the Church with humility, joy, and a deeply paternal heart. His final gesture on earth, like

St John Paul II before him, was to offer a blessing to the world on Easter Sunday, a fitting close to a life spent in service.

I had the privilege of encountering Pope Francis on six occasions. I concelebrated four Masses with him: twice at the Easter Vigil at St Peter's Basilica, once during World Youth Day in Poland in 2016 and again during his visit to Thailand in 2019.

The other two encounters were more personal. The first was in Rome in 1998, shortly after he was appointed Archbishop of Buenos Aires. I was at the tailor, checking on my new cassock being made for my upcoming ordination as a deacon, when Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio arrived, also having cassocks prepared for his new role. Our conversation was simple, warm, and down-to-earth. He spoke with the paternal kindness that would mark

his ministry for years to come.

Before parting, we promised to pray for one another, and throughout his life, he often repeated his humble request: “Please, pray for me.”

Years later, I met him again in Singapore, after a gathering with Catholic priests on 13 September 2024. We spoke about our shared connection to Córdoba: mine in Spain, his in Argentina, where he first became a bishop. When I mentioned that I would visit my mother soon, he immediately called his assistant, handed me a beautiful rosary, and said: “This is for your mother, on my behalf.” He blessed the rosary himself. His fatherly kindness was unmistakable, a kindness I believe he continues to show us now from heaven.

We thank God for the life and example of Pope Francis, and we continue to pray for him, trusting

that he intercedes for us from heaven. We also pray for his successor, who now carries forward the mission entrusted to Peter.

Fr. Joe Lopez

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