



*Dear Parishioners and Clergy of the Archdiocese,*

We have now all heard of the death of Pope Francis. The news media is replete with stories of him, and of speculation about his possible successor.

There is little doubt that he will go down in history as a bold and convicted leader of the Catholic family of Churches. The first pope from this side of the Atlantic, the first Jesuit pope, the first to take the name of Francis in imitation of his patron, Francis of Assisi. He was guided by St. Francis' spirit in living a simple lifestyle, showing great empathy for the poor and migrants, writing and preaching about the environment, bridging gaps between different faiths, most notably Christianity and Islam. He expressed concerns for those who feel outside the Church's care, and women. We in Alberta were honoured to have him in our Province for his sincere outreach to Indigenous Canadians. Not all devout Catholics shared his spirit or supported his actions, but I always felt he was guided by prayer and the commission of Jesus, to make disciples of all nations. The tributes are flowing in about Pope Francis; I don't need to repeat what you are hearing in appreciation of him from many corners. I personally felt both challenged and inspired by his encyclicals and statements. I am deeply grateful for his leadership.

I ask that we all pray for the repose of his soul, as we look forward to his funeral Mass in the Vatican this Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. I would love to watch it myself on television, but 10:00 am in Rome is 2:00 am in Alberta ... Am I up for this? We'll see.

I also ask for your fervent prayers as the College of Cardinals meets in conclave to prayerfully select a new Bishop of Rome. We all know that such a choice is important for us, our Church and the whole world. There are few world leaders who claim such a voice of faith, truth and justice. The next pope must be, like those before him, the choice of the Holy Spirit. Let our voices join with others in fervent prayer.

+ Gerard

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