



22 April 2025

To the People of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great sorrow we receive the news of the death of Pope Francis.

As a Church, we mourn the loss of our chief shepherd and universal pastor. Pope Francis led with compassion and humility. He will be remembered for his unshakable faith in God's mercy, his invitation to us all to live the joy of the Gospel, and his strong commitment to justice, particularly when it came to advocating for the poor and calling on us to be a Church of mercy. He was a true testament to living the Gospel.

Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis encouraged us all to act in faith. He was passionate about calling the world to care for the marginalised, to protect our common home, and to build a Church that reaches outward rather than turning inward. He lived by example; teaching us to truly know Christ, we must connect with and care for one another. He lived this mission and was a leader who valued dialogue over division and love over fear.

While we grieve, I encourage everyone to reflect on his leadership and think about the ways in which we can imitate him in our own lives. Each of us has a role in carrying on his vision of a Church that welcomes, serves and proclaims the joy of the Gospel.

I was fortunate to meet Pope Francis in 2019 when in Rome with the Australian bishops for our Ad Limina visit. For over an hour he spoke informally with us and spontaneously responded to our questions. His joy and humility shone through, as did his love for Jesus Christ, the Church, and for all of humanity and creation.

We take consolation that his death occurs as we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he said to us in his Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee year: "The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith and the basis of our hope ... Christian hope consists precisely in this: that in facing death, which appears to be the end of everything, we have the certainty that, thanks to the grace of Christ imparted to us in baptism, "life is changed, not ended."

Throughout my lifetime I have observed the Holy Spirit continually guide our cardinals to choose the right Pope for the right time. We give thanks to God for the life and papacy of Pope Francis and pray for the eternal rest of his soul. I also encourage you all to keep our global Catholic community in your hearts and prayers during this time of transition, as well as the Cardinals who will soon gather to elect his successor.

The Diocese will gather for a Memorial Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral at 6:30pm on Monday, 28 April, to celebrate and mourn in prayer. Further details will be available later today on the Diocesan website.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by a stylized 'M' and 'Kennedy'.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

Bishop Michael meeting Pope Francis in Rome in 2019

