

**Homily of Bishop Raimo Goyarrola at the Requiem Mass for Pope Francis**  
**Mikael Agricola Church, 3 May 2025**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends,

Today we have gathered to celebrate this holy Mass and to pray for our beloved Pope Francis. Francis was a tireless witness to God's love and mercy in the Church and in the world. In the readings we have just heard, we find comfort and hope. They reflect the life of our dear Pope lived in the service of God and of humankind.

In the first reading, Peter reminds us of the universality of Jesus' message: *"Now I really understand that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation, whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him"* (Acts 10:34-35). Pope Francis embraced this teaching with all his being. He bore witness to the fact that God's mercy knows no boundaries and must extend to every corner of the earth. All people share one Creator and Father; we are all brothers and sisters.

Like the Apostle Peter, Pope Francis understood that Christ calls us to serve one another, with special attention to those in the most vulnerable situations. A good shepherd leads his sheep with patience and gentleness. One of Francis' most memorable sayings was that a shepherd must "smell like the sheep." I once told him that in Finland we have more reindeer than sheep, and that as a bishop I wanted to be a shepherd who "smells like reindeer"—a *reindeer man*. He laughed heartily.

In the Gospel, we heard Jesus ask Peter: *"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"* (John 21:15). Peter replies, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,"* and Jesus says to him, *"Feed my sheep."* In the same way, Pope Francis was a true shepherd to the universal Church. He nourished his people with the Word of God and led us on the path of mercy and peace.

From the beginning, Pope Francis was an untiring advocate of mercy. Mercy is a treasure without end, calling us to live as true disciples of Christ, to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others. Francis constantly reminded us that mercy is not only a divine attribute, but also a virtue that must permeate our daily lives: in forgiveness, in helping those in need, in consolation, and in the openness of heart towards others. God's name is Mercy, but mercy is also the door to true humanity.

Mercy, as Francis lived it, calls us to step outside ourselves and approach those most in need: the poor, the oppressed, the excluded in all forms, and all human life from conception in the mother's womb to natural death. In the other, we always encounter God himself. Pope Francis taught us that true greatness lies not in power, but in service; not in honours, but in humility and love of neighbour.

This message rings out clearly here in Finland too—a country geographically distant from Rome but where Pope Francis was held in high esteem and is now remembered with warmth. The presence of the President of the Republic at the Pope's funeral in Rome, as well as the warm and extensive coverage by the Finnish media, are signs that the Catholic Church is part of

Finland's history and society. For this, I am deeply grateful. For four centuries, Finland received Western Christian culture and values through the Catholic Church. Later, the Holy See was among the first states to recognise Finland's independence.

In my personal meetings with Pope Francis, he always showed affection for Finland. He thanked us for our ecumenical work and pointed out that in the Vatican, our efforts for Christian unity are seen as being under God's special blessing. The "Finnish Way" of ecumenism is known in the Vatican as a model and an example on the path towards visible unity among Christians. Many Finnish bishops and church workers were able to meet Pope Francis during our annual ecumenical pilgrimages to Rome each January. Francis encouraged us to press forward courageously on this path.

At the centre of Francis' heart was the joy of the Gospel and the call to share it with all people. He reminded us that the Church lives by evangelization and called us to a new evangelization—not as a campaign, but as a way of life: an open heart that receives without prejudice, a hand that lifts up, a word that encourages, an ear that listens, eyes that recognise and acknowledge the other, and a mouth that proclaims Jesus, the Lord and Saviour.

A special sign of Pope Francis' personal connection with the Catholic Church in Finland was the gift he gave me when I became a bishop: his own cardinal's ring, which I now wear with love, as a reminder of his closeness and of our communion with all the bishops of the world. Just a few weeks before his death, Pope Francis also approved the opening of the canonization process of Bishop Hemming. Hemming was one of the most significant bishops in medieval Turku and Finland. He worked tirelessly to evangelize our country and did much for the wellbeing of the Finnish people. Francis was overjoyed by the support of the Lutheran and Orthodox archbishops for Hemming's canonization, which they saw as a benefit for all Finnish society and a step towards the visible unity of Christ's Church.

In the second reading of today's Mass, we hear of our calling as citizens of heaven, and of the hope we have in the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who will, at the end of time, transform our earthly body into a glorified body. Pope Francis desired that this Jubilee Year would be a Year of Hope. We have a hope that is not in vain, because Jesus has conquered death and loves us without end.

Francis added a new invocation to the Litany of the Rosary: *Holy Mary, Mother of Hope*. He had a deep and childlike love for the Virgin Mary, whom he saw as his spiritual mother. Before and after each apostolic journey, he would go to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome, pray before the icon of Mary, and leave a bouquet of flowers as a sign of gratitude. According to his wishes, Francis now rests there, near Mary—like a child in his mother's arms.

In this Mass, we entrust the soul of Francis to the merciful God. As the psalm says: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want"* (Ps 23:1). Pope Francis has completed his earthly pilgrimage, but his life and example still shine for us as a light. May he rest in the gentle arms of God, and may his intercession be always with us.

Amen.