Vatican
Vatican News



Dozens of reporters set up cameras outside St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 21, 2025, as news of Pope Francis' death spread. The Argentine pope died at 7:35 a.m. that morning at the age of 88. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

## Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — April 21, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis' funeral rites, like those for any pope or any Christian, are meant to "reinforce the hope and witness to the faith" that those who have been baptized in Christ "will rise with him to new life."

The prayer rituals for the formal recognition of his death April 21, his funeral and eight memorial Masses are designed as moments not of mourning but of prayers for his eternal rest in heaven and for the church.

The rites and rituals used are published in the "Ordo Exsequiarum Romani Pontificis" ("Funeral Rites of the Roman Pontiff"). The rites originally were approved by St. John Paul II in 1998 but were released only when he died in 2005. Modified versions of the rites were used after Pope Benedict XVI died Dec. 31, 2022.

A revised edition of the red cloth-bound book was published about a month before Pope Francis' 88th birthday in December.

Archbishop Diego Ravelli, master of papal liturgical ceremonies, had told Vatican News the revised edition was needed, "first of all because Pope Francis asked, as he himself stated on several occasions, to simplify and adapt some of the rites so that the celebration of the bishop of Rome's funeral would better express the church's faith in the risen Christ."

And, he said, the revised rites highlight "even more that the Roman Pontiff's funeral is that of a shepherd and disciple of Christ and not of a powerful man of this world."

In the book, the text of the rites, Masses and prayer services are given in their original Latin or Greek with Italian translations.

The introduction to the book asks all Catholics to remember in prayer the deceased pope's relatives and those who worked closely with him.

The prayers, it says, should express "gratitude for the good that the deceased pontiff did for the church and humanity."

In addition, the book says, "due respect" should be paid to the pope's body, "which with the sacraments of Christian initiation became a temple of the Holy Spirit and with the sacrament of episcopal orders was totally dedicated to serving the people of God."

The rites are divided into three "stations" based on the place they occur: "at home, in the Vatican basilica and at the burial place."

Even the moment of the formal verification of the pope's death takes place in the context of a prayer service "at home" in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae where he lived. The Vatican said that ritual would take place at 8 p.m. Rome time April 21.

Advertisement

The ritual book has separate services for transferring the body to St. Peter's Basilica, the funeral, the burial and the memorial Masses that follow the funeral for the next eight days.

As revised by Francis, the new rites maintain the practice of having the deceased pope's body placed in St. Peter's Basilica for public viewing and prayer before the funeral. However, instead of lying on a catafalque, that is, a kind of decorated platform, the body will be placed inside a zinc-lined coffin, which will remain open until the night before the funeral.

Just before the coffin is closed, the pope's body is blessed with holy water and his face is covered with a white silk cloth, and a small purse containing coins minted during his pontificate is placed in the coffin with the body.

In addition, a metal tube containing a copy of the "rogito" is buried with him. The "rogito" is a legal document, with a brief biography of the deceased pope, that formally attests to his death and burial. It is read during the rite.

The dean of the College of Cardinals, currently 91-year-old Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, presides over the pope's funeral Mass wearing red vestments.

The Gospel reading is from St. John's account of Jesus asking Peter, "Do you love me?" and telling him, "Feed my sheep."

The funeral Mass includes special prayers recited on behalf of the people of Rome, because the pope was their bishop, and on behalf of Eastern-rite Catholics.

Francis has done away with the practice of a pope's cypress coffin being placed inside a zinc coffin and then inside a coffin made of unspecified wood. Instead, he will be buried in the same zinc-lined wooden coffin used for the funeral.

Unless a pope chooses another burial place, his coffin is moved after the funeral Mass to the grotto of St. Peter's Basilica for burial.

When a pope, like Francis, has left instructions that he is to be buried somewhere else, it is the task of the papal master of ceremonies to make the appropriate arrangements.

In his autobiography, released in January (2025), Francis said, "I will not be buried in St. Peter's but at St. Mary Major. The Vatican is the home of my last service, not my eternal home."

He also explained, "I will go in the room where they now keep the candelabra," a small storage closet between the statue of Mary, Queen of Peace, and the chapel featuring the Marian icon "Salus Populi Romani" ("health of the Roman people") where he prayed before and after each of his foreign trips.

The funeral Mass is the first of nine formal Masses — called the "novendiali" for "nine days" — that are celebrated for a deceased pontiff. While the Masses are open to the public, their celebration is entrusted in rotation to specific groups, including employees and residents of Vatican City State, the Diocese of Rome, the chapters of the major basilicas of Rome, the Roman Curia, the Eastern churches and members of religious orders.

When the nine days have ended, the church begins following another set of rites and liturgies contained in the "Ordo Rituum Conclavis" ("Rites of the Conclave").

This story appears in the **The Legacy of Pope Francis** feature series. View the full series.