Vatican
Vatican News
People stand in line outside the Vatican to pay their respects to Pope Francis.

People stand in line outside the Vatican to pay their respects to Pope Francis, lying in state in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 23, 2025. Public viewing was to continue until April 25, the night before the late pope's funeral. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Rome — April 24, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

When Pope Francis' body arrives outside the papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore on Saturday, April 26, it will be greeted by Rome's poor and needy who will have the final chance to pay their respects before his burial.

"The poor have a special place in the heart of the Holy Father, who chose the name Francis to never forget them," said an April 24 statement from the Vatican announcing the decision.

Francis, who died on April 21 at 88, is set to become the first Roman pontiff buried outside the Vatican in over a century. Instead, he chose a small plot at Santa Maria Maggiore — about 3 miles from St. Peter's Basilica — for his final resting place.

Related: The history of St. Mary Major, the basilica where Pope Francis will be entombed

The late pope's affinity for the basilica, and in particular its icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Salus Populi Romani," was a constant draw for him long before he became pope. During his 12-year papacy, Francis went there to pray on more than 120 occasions, before and after every international trip and following each hospitalization.

About 3 p.m. today, thousands of people were waiting in line around the Vatican for a chance to view Francis' body, which is lying in state at St. Peter's Basilica.

The Vatican said earlier today that from 11 a.m. local time on April 23 to 1 p.m. local time on April 24, more than 61,000 people have visited the basilica. The atmosphere in Rome is both celebratory — with people waving flags from their homelands as they wait to pay tribute to the late pope — and somber, with some individuals crying and praying rosaries.

The doorway between confessionals in Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore

The doorway between confessionals in Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore is seen March 31, 2025. In his autobiography, released in January, Pope Francis said his tomb would be "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" where he prayed before and after his foreign trips. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

The pontiff's simple wooden coffin will be sealed on Friday evening (April 25) ahead of his funeral on Saturday.

Meanwhile, members of the College of Cardinals continue to arrive in Rome to participate in what are known as "general congregations," where they discuss the needs of the church prior to the election of a new pope.

At present, 113 cardinals are in Rome and attended today's meeting. The Vatican said that 34 of them spoke during discussions on "the church and the world."

The general congregations are set to resume on Friday morning (April 25).

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.

Advertisement

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