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A drone view shows people gathered outside the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Cathedral in Argentina April 26, 2025, for a memorial Mass for Pope Francis, formerly Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who died April 21 at age 88. (OSV News/Stringer via Reuters)



David Agren

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Thousands gathered for a massive Mass outside the Metropolitan Cathedral in Buenos Aires to remember the life and legacy of Pope Francis, whose ministry as archbishop in the Argentine capital of taking the church to the peripheries and prioritizing the poor became a template for his pontificate.

Archbishop Jorge García Cuerva of Buenos Aires celebrated an emotional Mass in the iconic Plaza de Mayo, where he told the assembled faithful on April 26, "We cry because we don't want death to triumph. We cry because the father of us all has died. We cry because we already feel his physical absence in our hearts. We cry because we feel orphaned."

The archbishop fought back tears during the Mass, celebrated hours after Francis' funeral at the Vatican. He recalled the pope teaching, "The world today needs to cry. The marginalized cry, those who are left aside cry. The despised cry. But those of us who live a life without great problems don't know how to cry. Only certain realities of life are seen with eyes cleansed by tears."

He continued, "Let us be brave, the pope said. Do not be afraid to cry. That is why today we mourn Francis. We do so from the depths of our hearts. Without shame, but also with the pain that unites us as a people. May our tears irrigate our homeland, making it fruitful in reconciliation and brotherhood."

Francis, born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, led the archdiocese of Buenos Aires from 1998 until his election in 2013. He became famous for austerity — famously riding the subway, regularly visiting poor barrios, or neighborhoods, and avoiding high society — while denouncing allegations of corruption.

Argentines rejoiced after his election, but the enthusiasm faded as the pope was pulled into Argentina's messy politics — with politicians trying to claim him as a fellow traveler or, in the case of President Javier Milei, attack him.

Milei — who previously derided Francis as a "filthy leftist," but eulogized him as "the most important Argentine in history," also shed tears, while attending the late pope's funeral. He told Radio Mitre in Argentina that he had apologized to Francis. "He told me, 'Don't get upset, these are youthful mistakes.'"

Following the April 26 Mass, people marched around the Plaza de Mayo as a "symbolic embrace" for Francis' legacy, while others visited impoverished areas of the city.

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The pope's beloved San Lorenzo de Almagro soccer club also paid homage to their Vatican fan April 26. During the first game after the Argentine pope's passing, the stadium was filled with not only pictures but also life-size statues of the pope, Reuters agency reported.

Many Argentines had a complicated relationship with the pope, who never returned to the country after leaving for the 2013 conclave. Analysts say many Argentines erroneously viewed Francis as a player in the country's politics rather than the leader of the universal church.

García Cuerva acknowledged the thorniness of Argentine politics, saying at an April 21 press conference, "We haven't let Bergoglio be Francis."

Priests who worked with the poor found an example in Francis. As archbishop, he prioritized a team of priests known as "curas villeros," who worked in Buenos Aires' shantytowns tackling vices such as poverty and drug addiction.

"We want to tell you that we will be united in order to transform the reality of these places," Fr. José María di Paola, a prominent cura villero better known as Padre Pepe, said in a video.

"We want to change an individualistic and selfish world as you have often proposed for a world of love, of fraternity, for the realization of community. We want no one to

be left out, that every person finds fulfillment in the community, that every person recovers in the community, that every person lives fully when they are in community. That is our goal. We will achieve it," he said.

"We will follow in your footsteps, Francis, and we want to tell you that everything you preached to us was not in vain."

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