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People gather in St. Peter's Square for Mass on the second day of the "novendiali" — nine days of mourning for Pope Francis marked by Masses — in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 27, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



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Mercy — the cornerstone of Pope Francis' teaching and ministry — must guide the Catholic Church through its period of mourning and the uncertainty that lies ahead, the Vatican's second-ranking official said.

Celebrating Mass April 27 for the second day of the "novendiali" — nine days of mourning for the late pope marked by Masses — Cardinal Pietro Parolin, former Vatican secretary of state, told some 200,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square on Divine Mercy Sunday that Francis had made the message of God's limitless mercy the heart of his pontificate.

"Our affection for him must not remain a mere emotion of the moment," Parolin said. "We must welcome his legacy and make it part of our lives, opening ourselves to God’s mercy and also being merciful to one another."

Although the Mass was officially one of mourning, jubilant crowds of young people who traveled to Rome for the Jubilee of Teenagers April 25-27 filed into the square early Sunday morning while cheering, singing songs and breaking out in chant.

"With the death of the pope all of our plans changed, but the kids are excited to be here for this important moment, it's incredible for them," said Jesús Serrano, who was accompanying a group of 185 young people from the Archdiocese of Madrid.

Like so many teenagers in St. Peter's Square, the group from Spain thought they were traveling to Rome to attend the canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis — an Italian teen who was set to be declared the church's first millennial saint by Francis.

Instead, they participated in the late pope's funeral Mass April 26 and returned to the Vatican the following day for his second memorial Mass. The brightly colored t-shirts, hats, flags and banners from each of the groups created a lively tapestry on the sun-soaked square.

Seated on stage in St. Peter's Square on either side of Parolin were the cardinals gathered in Rome for Pope Francis' funeral and Vatican employees dressed in mourning attire.

In his homily, the cardinal recognized the bittersweet atmosphere in the square, telling the young people that their presence was a visible sign of Easter joy even amid the church’s grief, adding that Francis "would have liked to meet you, to look into your eyes, and to pass among you to greet you."

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The cardinal encouraged the teenagers to hold fast to the hope that comes from Christ, even as they confront the challenges of the modern world, including rapid technological change and the rise of artificial intelligence.

"Never forget to nourish your lives with the true hope that has the face of Jesus Christ," he said. "With him, you will never be alone or abandoned, not even in the worst of times."

Highlighting the day's liturgical celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, Parolin said it was fitting to remember Francis, who had made mercy a hallmark of his pontificate.

"Pope Francis reminded us that 'mercy' is the very name of God, and, therefore, no one can put a limit on his merciful love with which he wants to raise us up and make us new people," he said.

The church, Parolin noted, must continue to be a place where mercy heals wounds, fosters reconciliation and overcomes hatred and division. "Only mercy heals and creates a new world, putting out the fires of distrust, hatred and violence," he said. "This is the teaching of Pope Francis."

As the tomb of Francis in the Basilica of St. Mary Major was opened to the public for the first time the morning of April 27, Parolin recalled the late pope’s deep devotion

to Mary, having chosen to be buried in the Marian basilica outside the Vatican, and entrusted the church to her care.

Standing alongside the icon of Mary that Francis often visited in that basilica during his pontificate, the cardinal prayed that she would "protect us, intercede for us, watch over the church and support the journey of humanity in peace and fraternity."

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