

# A Constant Mission: Pope Francis

Fr Paddy Carberry SJ looks at how Pope Francis explains the background of his intention for this month.



Pope Francis during a visit in Assisi, Italy

In the ten years since his election, Pope Francis has hardly stopped to draw a breath. In his writings and addresses, he has dealt in-depth with the two intertwined crises of our world: the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. He has laid the foundations of a less centralised Church by setting up structures to encourage the participation of the faithful at all levels. He has persisted with implementing a reform of the Church's central administration, sometimes against strong opposition. He has visited more than fifty countries, many of which were experiencing hardship or conflict. And

all of that in addition to the endless routine demands of his office: hosting world dignitaries, welcoming pilgrims, giving catechetical instructions and daily homilies, visiting Roman parishes, participating in interviews with the media, dealing with correspondence – and so much more. A younger person would balk at the relentless pressure involved, but Francis, now well into his eighties, never lets up.

From the time when Jesus appointed a simple fisherman to be the rock on which he would build his Church (Mt 16:18), the pope's role has grown in complexity. In his wildest dreams,

Pope's Intention: We pray for the Holy Father; as he fulfils his mission, may he continue to accompany the flock entrusted to him, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Peter could never have imagined that the task he would pass on to his successors would develop into the papacy as we know it today. That development was caused by many factors, among them the growth of local Churches, the encounter with different religions and civilisations, and the necessary interaction with civil and political life. New structures were developed in the light of new challenges, and it is clear that the papacy will continue to evolve as it engages with our fast-changing world.

Despite all its complexity, however, the pope's mission at its core is the same as that given to Peter all those years ago: to feed the sheep (Jn 21:15-17) and strengthen the faith of the community (Lk 22:32). Pope Francis has many roles in our complex world – the centre of unity in the Church, bishop of Rome, world leader, diplomat, head of state, teacher – but at heart he is a true shepherd 'with the smell of the sheep'. Like his Master, he is gentle and humble of heart. He is not afraid to show firm leadership, when necessary, but he is also happy to take his place with the rest of us as one of God's pilgrim people. We should be grateful for him – and pray

for him. (Taken from *Living Prayer 2023*, Messenger Publications).

### **The Pope's Worldwide Network of Prayer – Apostleship of Prayer**

Every month Pope Francis entrusts his Worldwide Prayer Network with prayer intentions that express his great concerns for humanity and for the mission of the Church. His monthly prayer intention is a global summons to transform our prayers into 'concrete actions'; it is a compass for the mission.

It summarises his action plan to mobilise us each month, through prayer and action, for a proposition that invites us to build a more humane and caring world.

These prayer intentions are the product of a long process of discernment within the Church, in various countries around the world. When the process concludes, after several months, the Pope, having received the proposals, takes time to pray and discern with regard to the challenges facing humanity and the mission of the Church. He then entrusts his twelve prayer intentions to all the faithful. They are guidelines for our life and mission.

### **Click to Pray**

*Click to Pray* is the official prayer platform of the Holy Father. The app connects hundreds of thousands of people who, on every continent, pray for the challenges facing humanity and the mission of the Church, which the Pope puts to us in his prayer intentions every month. Today it is available in Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, German, Italian and Chinese.