

## **FATHER FRANK'S LOG: 27th APRIL – 4th MAY 2025**

As I resume Father Frank's Log this week, I want to thank you once again for all the expressions of sympathy, kindness and support that I received after my dear brother Patrick's death. I also want to thank Father Gareth, Father John, and Brother Conor for providing me with the space I needed to deal with things at a practical, emotional and spiritual level. There's still a long way to go, and my life has been completely changed, but by God's grace I am getting there.

I was back in full ministry for Holy Week. I believe that the numbers for the Sacred Triduum were the biggest since Covid, and I have heard other churches say that too. There was a big gathering of young people too, and a healthy mix of nationalities. At the Easter Vigil in St Mungo's, I had the joy of celebrating all three Sacraments of Initiation with one person, and conferring the Sacrament of Confirmation on another. The sheer joy was very tangible and I got a lift from that too. There was, of course, the usual sausage roll fest in the hall afterwards, and so it was about 1.30 a.m. before I fell into bed, setting the alarm to be up again for the 10 a.m. Mass next morning. I was looking forward to a quiet Easter Week.

But then, on Easter Monday morning, came the news of the death of Pope Francis. I had watched his blessing from the Vatican on Easter Sunday, and saw how frail he looked, but I still didn't expect the sad news when it came. I was just opening the church at St Roch's when I received a text. I went into the car and listened to the radio, feeling a bit numbed and saddened. But, of course, there was a certain sense of providence as well. We all knew his remaining time would be short, and the fact that he mustered himself to appear on the balcony of St Peter's to give his urbi-et-orbi blessing, to say a final *Alleluia*, and was then able to make his journey through the crowd to greet and bless the people afterwards, left us with an abiding memory that captured the courage and the humility of this beautiful man. Someone described it as his last homily, a homily without words, which are often the best kind. He then gave himself permission to surrender his life and his soul to God. Again, I liked these words that someone sent me: *He waited for Easter – because he believed in the promise. And now that promise is his. Light has found him, and Love has brought him home.*

Francis is the seventh pope during my lifetime. I remember how delighted I was that he took the name Francis, after St Francis of Assisi. There had been a great devotion to St Francis of Assisi in my own family, his picture adorning the wall of my granny's, where I would often spend the night if I was serving early morning mass in St Simon's next day, which was often, a holy picture to be touched in prayer each night on the way to bed, or more accurately to the sofa in my grand-uncle Tony's room, and that was how I had come to be given the name, which was also my father's name. And how well our dear pope lived up to the name. From that first moment he came out on to the balcony in 2013 and greeted people, asking the whole church to pray for him, he has exuded the simplicity, humility, love of the poor, care for creation, a desire for peace, and an abundant mercy, that were the hallmarks of his namesake.

By the time you read this log, the funeral of Pope Francis will have taken place, and also his burial, not in St Peter's, but in Santa Maria Maggiore, where he often went to pray, and the church will be preparing for the conclave to elect the 267th pope, the eighth of my lifetime. Who will it be? What part of the world will he come from? Will he continue the legacy of Pope Francis? At such times we need to trust in the grace of the Holy Spirit, working through the cardinal electors, frail human beings like the rest of us, that the church will be blessed with the shepherd it needs at this difficult time in the history of the world and of the church.

***As ever, protect yourself, your loved ones and others, and protect Christ in your lives.***