

# Pope Francis and the Papacy

Lesson 3: When a Pope Dies:  
Honoring a Spiritual Leader  
Grades 3-5, Middle and High Schools

Produced by the  
Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America  
Office of Educational Services



# Pope Francis and the Papacy



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# Note to Teachers

Dear Teachers,

As we embark on these lessons, we will be using a traditional novena to pray for the soul of the Pope. A novena is a long-standing Catholic devotional practice of prayer, traditionally observed over nine consecutive days. However, many people—especially those outside of Catholic traditions—may be unfamiliar with this practice. To provide context for both you and your students, here is a brief overview of the history and significance of the novena.

## **What is a Novena?**

The word novena comes from the Latin novem, meaning “nine.” It refers to a structured prayer repeated for nine days (or weeks), often for a specific intention, such as intercession, healing, thanksgiving, or preparation for a major feast. Novenas can be prayed privately or as a community devotion.

## **Historical and Biblical Background**

The practice of praying for nine days has roots in Sacred Scripture. The first and most important example comes from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:12-14), when the Blessed Virgin Mary and the disciples prayed together for nine days between Jesus’ Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This period of prayerful waiting laid the foundation for the novena tradition.

By the Middle Ages, novenas became common in preparation for major feast days and as acts of petition for divine help. They gained popularity through Spain, Italy, and France, and missionaries later spread the practice worldwide.

## **Why Are We Praying a Novena for the Pope’s Soul?**

The Catholic Church encourages prayers for the dead, particularly through Masses, indulgences, and special devotions like novenas. In this case, we are praying a novena specifically for the repose of the Pope’s soul. This is an act of charity and faith, rooted in the belief that our prayers assist the departed on their journey toward full communion with God.

## **How to Approach This with Students**

Since some students may be unfamiliar with Catholic devotions, this lesson offers an opportunity to:

- Explain the biblical and historical roots of the novena.
- Emphasize its purpose as a structured form of perseverance in prayer.
- Discuss the importance of praying for the dead in Christian tradition.
- Encourage an appreciation of diverse prayer practices within the Church.

This lesson provides a meaningful way to engage in prayerful reflection, teach the importance of intercession, and honor the legacy of the Pope. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.

Blessings,

*Cristiana Ritchie-Bonomo*

Cristiana Ritchie-Bonomo, Ph.D.  
ERCBNA OES  
Director

# Lesson Plan

Grade: Grades 3-5

Subject:

Date:


Topic: When a Pope Dies: Honoring a Spiritual Leader?

Lesson # Three

Learning Objectives:

**SWBAT illustrate the significance of a Pope's passing, how the Church mourns, and how we pray for his soul through a traditional novena.**

Materials Needed:

-  Handout: "What Happens When a Pope Dies?" (Page 6)
-  Candle & Prayer Card Craft Supplies
-  Memorial Prayer Service Guide
-  Traditional Novena for the Pope's Soul (Simplified Version Page 7)

Structure / Activity:

**1. Introduction (10 min) – Understanding Loss & Mourning in the Church**

- Ask students:
- "Have you ever lost someone special? How did your family remember them?"
- Explain: When a Pope dies, Catholics around the world mourn because he was our spiritual father.

 Distribute and read the handout on page. .

**2. Activity (15 min) – Candle & Prayer Card Craft**

 Students will create a candle decoration and prayer card for the Pope.

 **Candle Craft:**

- Decorate a paper candle with prayers and symbols of faith.
- Write "Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord" on the base.

 **Prayer Card:**

- Write a short prayer for the Pope on a small card.
- Draw a symbol of peace (e.g., a dove or cross).



## Structure / Activity:

### 3. Conclusion (10 min) – Simple Memorial Prayer Service

Students gather around their candles.

Teacher leads a short prayer:

🙏 Prayer for the Pope's Soul:

***"Lord, we thank You for Pope [Name] and his love for the Church.  
Welcome him into Heaven and bless those who will choose the next  
Pope. Amen."***

Students place their prayer cards in a basket as an offering.



# What Does It Mean When a Pope Dies?

The Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church, and when he dies, the Church comes together to honor his life and pray for him.

## What Happens Next?



1. A bell rings in Vatican City.
  - A special Church bell rings to let people know the Pope has died.



2. The Pope's Body is placed in St. Peter's Basilica
  - People come from all over the world to pray and say goodbye to him.



3. A Special Funeral Mass is Held.
  - Cardinals, bishops, world leaders, and thousands of Catholics gather to pray for the Pope's soul.



4. We Begin Praying for a New Pope
  - The Church prepares to choose a new Pope through a conclave (a special election).



### Why Do We Pray for the Pope?

To ask God to welcome him into Heaven.

- To thank God for his leadership and teachings.
- To pray for the Church as it prepares for a new Pope.

## **Simplified Novena for the Pope's Soul (Grades 3-5 Version)**

**Day 1:**

**"Dear God, we pray for Pope [Name]. He was a good shepherd to Your people. Welcome him into Your heavenly kingdom. Amen."**

**Day 2:**

**"Lord, thank You for Pope [Name]'s love and kindness. May he find peace and joy with You forever. Amen."**

**Day 3:**

**"Jesus, You said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Pope [Name] worked for peace in the world. Grant him eternal rest. Amen."**

**Day 4:**

**"Loving God, forgive any sins Pope (Name), may have committed. Grant him peace now and forever. Amen."**

**Day 5:**

**"Holy Spirit, comfort the Church as we miss Pope (Name). We pray his example of goodness and love will inspire future leaders. Amen."**

**Day 6:**

**"Mother Mary, Queen of Heaven, help Pope (Name) as he enters into heaven and lives in joy forever. Amen"**

**Day 7**

**"Saints and Angels, welcome Pope (Name) into heaven. May he praise God forever. Amen"**

**Day 8**

**"Dear God, we pray for Your Mercy on Pope (Name). May he rest in the peace of Christ. Amen"**

**Day 9**

**"Lord we give you thanks for the life and service of Pope (Name). May we follow his example and remain faithful to Your Church. Amen."**

# Lesson Plan

Grade: Middle to High School

Subject:

Date:








Topic: The Death of a Pope: What Happens Next?

Lesson # Three

## Learning Objectives:

**SWBAT illustrate the significance of a Pope's passing, how the Church mourns, and how we pray for his soul through a traditional novena.**

## Materials Needed:

-  Handout: "The Church in Mourning: What Happens When a Pope Dies?" Page 10
-  Scripture Reflection: John 11:25-26 Page 11
-  Traditional Novena for the Pope's Soul (Student Guide) Pages 12-15.
-  Activity 1: Personal Reflection on Leadership & Legacy
-  Activity 2: Historical Analysis – How the Church Has Handled Papal Deaths
-  Activity 3: Writing Prayers for the Pope's Soul & Participating in a Novena
-  Optional: Classroom Memorial & Novena Prayer Service

## Structure / Activity:

### 1. Introduction – The Impact of a Pope's Death (10 min)

#### Discussion Questions:

- *How do different cultures and religions honor their leaders after death?*
- *Why do you think the death of a Pope is such a significant event for Catholics?*

 Distribute the handout below and read aloud as a class.

### 2. Activity 1 – Personal Reflection on Leadership & Legacy (15 min)

 Students will write a short reflection answering one of the following prompts:

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What qualities make a great leader? How did the Pope demonstrate those qualities?
2. If you were giving a eulogy for the Pope, what would you say about his impact on the Church?
3. What lesson from the Pope's life can you apply to your own faith journey?

◆ Option: Students can share their reflections in small groups or with the class.

## Structure / Activity:

### 3. Activity 2 – Historical Analysis: How the Church Has Handled Papal Deaths (20 min)

✦ Students will research how past Popes were mourned and how funeral traditions have changed over time.

#### 📖 Historical Research Questions:

1. How did the Church respond when Pope John Paul II or Pope Benedict XVI passed away?
2. How were the funeral rites different in past centuries compared to today?
3. How has the role of media changed the way the world reacts to the death of a Pope?

◆ Option: Students can present their findings in a brief timeline, poster, or digital infographic.

### 4. Activity 3 – Writing Prayers for the Pope's Soul & Participating in a Novena (15 min)

📖 Distribute the Novena Guide (See Below).

📖 Day 1 Novena Prayer (Recite Together as a Class)

"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen."

✍️ Prayer-Writing Assignment:

- Each student will write a short personal prayer for the Pope's soul.
- The class can gather these prayers in a memorial book or read them aloud during a short prayer service.

### 5. *Conclusion – Classroom Memorial & Novena Prayer Service*

✦ Format for a Classroom Memorial Service:

🕯️ Opening Prayer:

"Lord, we give You thanks for the life and service of Pope [Name]. May he rest in the peace of Christ."

📖 Scripture Reading: John 14:1-3

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms..."*

🙏 Traditional Novena for the Pope's Soul (Days 1-9)

📖 Distribute the full novena guide for students to pray for nine days.

🎵 Optional: Hymn or Moment of Silence

## Assessment:

- ✓ Personal Reflection Response – Did students thoughtfully reflect on leadership and legacy?
- ✓ Historical Analysis – Did students present key differences in how Popes have been mourned?
- ✓ Novena Participation – Did students write meaningful prayers and participate in the prayer service?

## Final Notes:

- ✓ This lesson provides a structured way for students to honor a Pope's passing.
- ✓ It incorporates history, prayer, and personal reflection.
- ✓ It introduces students to the tradition of a novena for the Pope's soul.



## Handout: The Church in Mourning – What Happens When a Pope Dies?

### The Death of a Pope: What Happens Next?

The Pope is not just the leader of the Catholic Church—he is also a spiritual father to over 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide. His passing marks a time of mourning, prayer, and preparation.



#### The Rituals of Mourning



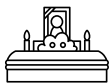
#### Official Announcement of the Pope's Death

- The Camerlengo (the Vatican official responsible during this period) formally announces the Pope's death.
- Bells toll in Vatican City, and the world receives the news.



#### A Period of Public Mourning Begins

- The Pope's body is placed in St. Peter's Basilica for public visitation.
- Catholics from around the world travel to Vatican City to pray and pay respects.



#### The Funeral Mass

- A solemn funeral Mass is held in St. Peter's Square, attended by cardinals, bishops, world leaders, and thousands of Catholics.
- The Pope is buried in St. Peter's Basilica, often near previous Popes.



#### The Church Prepares for a New Pope

- The College of Cardinals gathers for General Congregations, meetings to discuss the Church's future needs.
- A Conclave is announced, and cardinals prepare to elect a new Pope.



#### Why Do Catholics Pray for the Pope After His Death?

- To ask God to welcome him into eternal rest.
- To pray for the Church during this time of transition.
- To reflect on his teachings and how we can live them out.



#### A Longstanding Tradition: The Nine-Day Novena for the Pope's Soul

- Catholics pray for the Pope for nine days after his death—this is called a novena.
- The novena includes specific prayers asking for God's mercy on the Pope's soul.
- This tradition is rooted in praying for the souls of the faithful departed as an act of love and faith.



## Scripture Reflection: John 11:25-26

*"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26)*

### **Reflection:**

*In this passage, Jesus speaks to Martha after the death of her brother, Lazarus. She is grieving, and Jesus comforts her by revealing a profound truth: He is the resurrection and the life.*

### ***This verse reminds us that:***

- Death is not the end – Jesus promises eternal life to those who believe in Him.
- Faith in Christ brings hope – Even in sadness, we trust that God welcomes His faithful servants into Heaven.
- We are called to believe – Just as Jesus asked Martha, He asks us: Do you believe this?
- 

### **Applying This to the Pope's Passing:**

Pope [Name] dedicated his life to Christ and His Church. Now, we trust in Jesus' promise that those who believe in Him will live forever. As we mourn, we find comfort in knowing that our Holy Father is now at peace in God's presence. This scripture inspires us to deepen our own faith and continue the Pope's mission of sharing Christ's love with the world.

### **Prayer Inspired by John 11:25-26:**

🙏 *"Lord Jesus, You are the resurrection and the life. We trust in Your promise that all who believe in You will have eternal life. We pray for Pope [Name], who served You faithfully on earth. May he now rejoice in Your heavenly kingdom. Strengthen our faith, and help us to live as witnesses of Your truth. Amen."*

This reflection can be read before the novena prayers or used in class discussions on faith, hope, and eternal life.



# Traditional Novena for the Repose of the Pope's Soul

**A nine-day prayer devotion to commend the Pope's soul to God's mercy and pray for the Church in transition.**

## **How to Pray This Novena:**


Begin with the Sign of the Cross.


Read the Scripture Reflection for the day.

Recite the Daily Intention and Prayer.

Conclude with the Final Prayer for the Pope's Soul.

## **Day 1: Trust in God's Mercy**


 "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and great in mercy."  
(Psalm 145:8)

 **Daily Intention:** *We pray that Pope [Name] may find eternal rest in the presence of the Lord.*

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"Heavenly Father, we entrust Pope [Name] to Your boundless mercy. He devoted his life to serving You and guiding Your Church. Grant him eternal peace, and may he rejoice forever in Your presence. Amen."*

## **Day 2: Christ, the Good Shepherd**


 "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."  
(John 10:11)


 **Daily Intention:** We pray in gratitude for the Pope's shepherding of the Church.

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"Lord Jesus, You called Pope [Name] to be a shepherd to Your people. May he now rest in the safety of Your eternal embrace. May his life's work continue to bear fruit in the Church. Amen."*

## **Day 3: A Servant of the Gospel**

 "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:23)

 **Daily Intention:** We pray that the Pope's example of faith may inspire the Church.

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"O God, You called Pope [Name] to serve Your people with love and humility. May his life of faithfulness inspire us to follow You with courage and dedication. Welcome him into Your heavenly kingdom. Amen."*



# Traditional Novena for the Repose of the Pope's Soul



## Traditional Novena for the Repose of the Pope's Soul

A nine-day prayer devotion to commend the Pope's soul to God's mercy and pray for the Church in transition.

### How to Pray This Novena:


Begin with the Sign of the Cross.


Read the Scripture Reflection for the day.

Recite the Daily Intention and Prayer.

Conclude with the Final Prayer for the Pope's Soul.

### Day 4: Forgiveness and Mercy


 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

 **Daily Intention:** We pray for the forgiveness of any sins Pope [Name] may have committed.

 **Daily Prayer:**

"Loving Father, in Your great mercy, cleanse Pope [Name] of any human weakness and sin. Look upon him with kindness and welcome him into the eternal joy of Heaven. Amen."

### Day 5: Hope in the Resurrection

 "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." (John 11:25)


 **Daily Intention:** We pray that Pope [Name] may share in the joy of the Resurrection.

 **Daily Prayer:**

"Jesus, You conquered death and opened the gates of Heaven. May Pope [Name] now see You face to face and rejoice in Your presence for all eternity. Amen."

### Day 6: A Life of Service

 "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant." (Mark 10:43)

 **Daily Intention:** We pray in gratitude for the Pope's selfless dedication to God's people.

 **Daily Prayer:**

"Lord, You called Pope [Name] to a life of service in Your Church. May his example of humility and love continue to inspire Your people. Bless the Church as we mourn his passing and prepare for new leadership. Amen."




# Traditional Novena for the Repose of the Pope's Soul


A nine-day prayer devotion to commend the Pope's soul to God's mercy and pray for the Church in transition.

## How to Pray This Novena:

Begin with the Sign of the Cross.  
Read the Scripture Reflection for the day.  
Recite the Daily Intention and Prayer.  
Conclude with the Final Prayer for the Pope's Soul.

## Day 7: Comfort for the Church


 *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4)*


 **Daily Intention:** *We pray for the Church as it grieves the loss of its shepherd.*

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"Holy Spirit, bring comfort to the Church as we mourn the loss of our Holy Father. Strengthen us in faith and guide us as we await the election of a new Pope. Amen."*

## Day 8: The Communion of Saints


 *"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20)*


 **Daily Intention:** *We pray that Pope [Name] may join the company of the saints in Heaven.*

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"Loving God, You promise eternal life to those who follow You. May Pope [Name] now stand among the saints, praising You forever. Amen."*

## Day 9: Thanksgiving for the Pope's Life & Legacy

 *"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever." (Psalm 136:1)*

 **Daily Intention:** *We give thanks for Pope [Name]'s leadership and pray for his eternal rest.*

 **Daily Prayer:**

*"Heavenly Father, we thank You for the life and witness of Pope [Name]. May his faithfulness continue to inspire the Church. Welcome him into Your kingdom and grant him everlasting joy. Amen."*

## **Final Prayer for the Pope's Soul** (Prayed Each Day After the Daily Prayer)

*"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.  
May he rest in peace. Amen."*





# Traditional Novena for the Repose of the Pope's Soul



## How to Use This Novena in the Classroom or Parish

✦ **Option 1:** Daily Classroom or Parish Gathering – Begin or end each class with the Scripture Reflection, Daily Intention, and Prayer.

✦ **Option 2:** Individual Prayer Journals – Students or parishioners can reflect on each day's theme in writing.

✦ **Option 3:** Novena Prayer Service on Day 9 – Hold a final memorial Mass or classroom prayer service in honor of the Pope.

Final Notes:

✓ This novena follows Catholic tradition, focusing on scripture, reflection, and intercession.

✓ It is adaptable for individual prayer, classroom settings, or parish communities.

✓ It provides a beautiful way to honor the Pope's life and entrust his soul to God's mercy.

