Columns
Spirituality



Pope Francis greets visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican to pray the Angelus on Aug. 27, 2023. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Jorge Bergoglio had many weaknesses, like any other mortal. Some we knew, because he wasn't one to pretend. Others are known only to his closest companions, or perhaps only to God.

Among the known weaknesses was his pulmonary fragility. Surely it wasn't so strong at certain times in his life, at others it was, but it was always there (as our frailties tend to be, reminding us daily that we are creatures).

And perhaps because he knew what it was like to struggle for breath, in the maturity of his life he helped the church to breathe. If I were to use images, I would dare to say that if Pope John XXIII opened the windows to let in fresh air, Francis took the church out into the open field.

Therefore, as soon as we heard the news of his passing, the psalm came to my mind: "He brought me out into a spacious place, he rescued me because he delighted in me."

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I felt that we could breathe the freedom of the baptized people we are. All of us, men and women.

I was particularly impressed and moved by Evangelii Gaudium, both as a programmatic exhortation and because it addressed issues that were strong in Argentina in the 1980s, when I entered my religious congregation: the sense of community, the person-to-person mission, the evangelization of culture, the integral liberation of each person and of peoples, the conviction that the people of God possess a sense of faith, etc. Francis renewed my enthusiasm for all of this.

The path of the synod on synodality was marked by many gestures, by his bold hopes for the future. For example, it was moving to see, during the sessions in Rome, cardinals sitting next to laywomen, priests next to monks, nuns next to bishops, all seated together at round tables. It was a synod where birthdays were celebrated and the children of synod participants were greeted like one big ecclesial family.

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And it was not only exciting, it was motivating. Motivating to dare to break molds, to think of new structures, to imagine other ways of being church. Like ecclesial assemblies, like networks protecting the great biomes of the world, like the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region.

Francis was a man who knew what it was like to feel there was no air. A man who fully embraced that physical weakness in his death. So, I imagined him that morning breathing deeply the full air of total love.

Breathe deeply, Francis! You deserve it! Thank you for bringing us out into the open air!

Now it is up to us not to be afraid of the elements and to continue walking as pilgrims of hope.

This column was originally published in Spanish.

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