



Pope Francis pauses to pray at the graves of infants who were miscarried during his visit to Rome's Laurentino cemetery to celebrate Mass on the feast of All Souls, Nov. 2, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Pope Francis prayed at the graves of children and of miscarried babies on the feast of All Souls before concelebrating Mass with several hundred mourners.

The pope traveled Nov. 2 to Rome's Laurentino cemetery, which has a special section for children who have died and, nearby, a section called the "Garden of the Angels" where parents who have experienced a miscarriage can opt to have their children buried rather than having a hospital dispose of the remains.

A father who had lost a son greeted the pope, kneeling to kiss the pope's hand, and then pointing to his son's grave.

Francis left a bouquet of white roses at the entrance to the garden where stuffed animals, toys, pinwheels and pots of white chrysanthemums in the shape of a heart stand in contrast to the candles and flowers on other graves. The grave markers have only one date on them.

Rather than giving a homily during the Mass, the pope led the congregation in a long moment of silent reflection.

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Francis' prayer intention for the month of November is for parents who have lost a child. In his video message asking people to join him in the prayer, he began by saying, "What can we say to parents who have lost a child? How can we console them? There are no words."

At the end of the Mass, the pope prayed that by visiting the graves of their beloved deceased, people would renew their faith in Jesus, who died, was buried and rose again to save humanity.

The bodies of those who have died will rise again on the last day, he said, and those who have fallen asleep in the Lord will join him in the triumph over death.

He prayed that God would hear people's prayers for their beloved dead and would "open your arms of mercy" and receive them into the heavenly host.

"Comfort those who are suffering the pain of separation with the certainty that the dead live in you," he prayed, "and that even the bodies entrusted to the earth will one day participate in the paschal victory of your son."

The main celebrant at the Mass was Archbishop Diego Ravelli, the master of papal liturgical ceremonies. However, unlike at most public Masses in the last few years where the pope presides, but does not concelebrate, Francis stood for the Eucharistic prayer and concelebrated the Mass.