# Visitors grapple with smartphone use during Pope Francis's lying in state at St Peter’s Basilica



Inside St Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, a diverse crowd gathered to pay their respects as Pope Francis lay in state, marking a solemn moment steeped in history. The event drew extensive queues outside the basilica, with many attendees reflecting on the significance of the late pontiff’s life and legacy. However, the atmosphere inside revealed a complex dynamic between reverence and modern technology, as numerous visitors held up smartphones to capture images and videos of the historic occasion.

The Mirror’s Matthew Young, reporting from the scene, described the scene as one where “endless arms” were raised, holding mobile phones, with at least half of those present viewing the Pope’s open coffin through a digital screen rather than direct sight. This use of phones during the viewing was highlighted as a notable departure from traditional quiet contemplation associated with such rituals.

Among those present were Martin Gilsenan and his wife Catherine, both 59 and from Wimbledon, London. The couple had travelled some 100 miles from Rome during their holiday in Italy specifically to pay their respects. Speaking to The Mirror, Catherine remarked, “I found the mobile phones very distasteful. I was very surprised there were photos.” Martin added, comparing the event to the lying-in-state of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022, “People were being asked to put their selfie sticks away when they got to the front. There were also many people looking around and getting upset with those on the phones. We have phones but we kept them in our pockets and afterwards found a spot inside the church for 15 minutes of quiet contemplation.”

Despite these challenges, moments of profound significance were noted. Matthew Young recounted the powerful image of Pope Francis’s hands, with rosary beads wrapped around three fingers on his right hand, draping along his robe, which brought a palpable sense of the occasion’s gravity. The detailed observation of the embalmed Pope’s likeness, including his pale, waxy skin and subtle features such as his painted nails, underscored the surreal nature of viewing such a well-known figure in death.

Emotional scenes unfolded as well; attendees shared intimate moments of grief and remembrance. One woman was seen crying while holding a photograph of the Pope, comforted by her husband, while others lit candles or stood silently, overcome by emotion.

Not all reactions centred on the smartphone controversy. Matheus Silva, a 27-year-old visitor from Buenos Aires, Argentina—Pope Francis’s native city—expressed a personal connection. As a gay man, Matheus spoke about his respect for Pope Francis’s efforts toward making the Church more inclusive of the LGBTQ community. “He is the first pope to have talked on this subject, so seeing him just now, it felt personal to me,” Matheus said. “I just hope the next pope continues what Francis started.”

The gathering at St Peter’s Basilica reflected both the enduring influence of Pope Francis and the complexities of witnessing such events in the digital age, as tradition intersected with contemporary behaviours.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-04/pope-francis-rite-translation-body-vatican-basilica.html> - Corroborates the transfer of Pope Francis's body to St. Peter's Basilica and the gathering of mourners there. It highlights the role of the College of Cardinals in the procession and the planned Funeral Mass.
2. <https://people.com/pope-francis-lies-in-state-open-casket-st-peters-basilica-photos-11719932> - Reports Pope Francis lying in state at St. Peter's Basilica, including details about his body being taken from Casa Santa Marta and over 20,000 people attending the procession.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvmJfddZPAw> - Supports the coverage of Pope Francis lying in state at St. Peter's Basilica, expecting tens of thousands of visitors.
4. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-04/pope-francis-rite-translation-body-vatican-basilica.html> - Provides information on the liturgical rites and prayers conducted during the translation of Pope Francis's body to St. Peter's Basilica.
5. <https://people.com/pope-francis-lies-in-state-open-casket-st-peters-basilica-photos-11719932> - Mentions the crowds and the procession, which aligns with descriptions of the event's scale and solemnity.
6. <https://www.facebook.com/[cannot be added as it does not provide specific corroboration]> - Not applicable. Due to the need for specific corroboration, this link cannot be used. Instead, other sources like news outlets should be referenced.
7. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/i-saw-pope-francis-body-35106680> - Please view link - unable to able to access data