



An ancient Vatican ritual that holds a profound spiritual truth: how much is your soul worth?

Introduction: A gesture that transcends centuries

When a Pope dies, the Church not only loses its visible shepherd on earth, but an elaborate ceremonial unfolds—steeped in history, symbolism, and prayer. Among the many ancient gestures discreetly preserved in this sacred rite, there is one almost no one knows about, but which reveals a deep theological truth: **the placement of the *lire papali* in the coffin of the Pontiff.**

Why bury the Pope with coins? What is the meaning of this for us today? Can an old custom teach us something vital about our own death... and about how to live?

1. The Forgotten Ritual: What are the *lire papali*?

Before the euro and even before the modern Vatican State, there was an official currency within the Papal States: the **papal lira**, or *lira pontificia*. This currency was not just an economic tool but also a **symbol of the Pope's spiritual and temporal sovereignty.**

When a Pontiff died, **three papal lira coins** were placed inside his coffin. This gesture was rich in symbolism: not meant to literally pay a fare to heaven—the Church has never taught such a thing—but rather to **represent the Pope's detachment from earthly goods** and his total trust in the mercy of God.

These coins, along with a parchment summarizing his pontificate, served as silent seals of his passage from the temporal to the eternal.

2. A Tradition with Deep Roots

Though it may seem like an archaic or decorative practice, this gesture has roots reaching back to the ancient world. In many cultures, such as the Greek or Roman, it was believed that one had to pay Charon, the ferryman of Hades, to cross into the afterlife. Although the Church rejects any superstition or pagan mythology, **she transformed this symbol into**



one of redemption and Christian hope.

It is not that the Pope “buys” his way into heaven—thinking that would be heretical—but that **he humbly acknowledges that, even as the Vicar of Christ, he approaches God like any other soul: poor, naked, and in need of grace.**

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” (1 Timothy 6:7)

The *lire papali* in the Pope's coffin, then, remind us of a profound truth: **we own nothing, not even our life; all is gift, all is grace.**

3. The Symbolism: From Power to Poverty

During his life, the Pope wears splendid vestments, celebrates Mass in majestic basilicas, and speaks from the Chair of Peter... but **at death, his funeral rite is strikingly austere.**

Inside the cypress coffin, a few simple symbols are placed:

- an open Gospel on his chest,
- the parchment briefly recounting his life and service,
- and the coins, which in some cases are made of gold, silver, and bronze, symbolizing theological virtues or stages of life.

This contrast teaches us something essential: **what gives value to a life is not power or fame, but self-giving, humility, and fidelity to God.**

4. The Theology Behind a Coin

In Sacred Scripture, coins play a curious role. They are small and material, yet often reveal profound truths:

- The widow's mite, who gives all she has (Mark 12:41-44)



- The lost coin, symbolizing the sinner sought out by God (Luke 15:8-10)
- The tribute to Caesar and the call to give to God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21)

Likewise, the *lire papali* in the Pope's coffin **speak of a spiritual economy**, a divine bookkeeping where value is not measured in metal, but in love. In this sense, these coins **are not a medieval superstition but a silent catechesis on eternal life.**

5. What Can We Learn from This Tradition?

This gesture may seem meaningful only in the papal liturgy, but **all of us—absolutely all of us—can learn from it.** Here are some spiritual lessons you can apply in your daily life:

a) Live Detached from Earthly Goods

The Pope, buried with only a few coins, reminds us that **everything accumulated in this life is left behind.** We take nothing with us—except our works of charity, faith, and hope.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:19-20)

b) Prepare Each Day for Eternity

We do not know when our final day will come. What “coin” will we offer to God? Will it be a life of love, service, and reconciliation?

c) Remember That Christ Is Our True Treasure

The Pope, even with power over millions of Catholics, dies like any of us: **fragile, mortal, in need of redemption.** And that brings us back to the most consoling truth: **Christ is our only true wealth.**



6. And Today? A Timely Application for Everyone

In a society that idolizes money, power, and image, this small gesture in the Pope's funeral is **a slap in the face to modern materialism**. It confronts us with a fundamental question: **What am I storing up for eternity?**

Today, you can:

- Do a small hidden act of charity, like giving alms or visiting someone who is sick.
- Go to confession, to empty your soul of what is useless and fill it with God's grace.
- Place a cross or a miraculous medal next to your valuables as a symbol that **Christ is your real treasure**.
- Teach your children the value of the eternal over the material, perhaps by telling them this story of the *lire papali*.

Conclusion: A Coin Worth Eternity

The next time you hear about a papal funeral, remember: **in his coffin there are coins—not to pay heaven, but to proclaim that not even the Pope is saved by his merits, but solely by the mercy of God.**

That is your truth, too, and mine.

We are called to live **as poor in spirit**, knowing that our only true wealth is having loved, served, and believed.

And you—what will you carry with you when you close your eyes to this world?

Perhaps just a few coins... but if they are made of love, they will be more than enough for the Kingdom of God.