

Jeb Bush: The Catholic Church 'Has Grounded Me and My Beliefs'

Millions of American Catholics, like me, are excited that Pope Francis is making his first journey to the United States. In our Holy Father, we have a model of personal holiness and deep concern for the most vulnerable among us. He reminds us to speak out for the persecuted, advocate for the unborn, comfort the afflicted and welcome the stranger.

Catholicism has grounded my own life. In Catholic teachings, the family is a "domestic church," and the Catholic faithful are a kind of extended family. The Catholic Church has always bound my own family together.

Even before my own conversion, we attended Mass together, sharing as a family the message of hope and love, praying for peace and grace. My wife was raised in the Catholic faith, we were married in a Catholic student center, and we in turn raised our children as Catholics.

After I lost my first campaign for governor of Florida in 1994, I took stock of my life and my beliefs, and I decided to fully embrace the faith that had been guiding my family and me for many years. I attended Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults classes. I gained a deeper appreciation for the sacraments of the church and the grace they impart. I studied Catholic Church doctrine, and how it is renewed in every age. The more I learned, the more I appreciated the rich history of the Church and its teachings, and my heart was changed by God's hand.

In the 20 years since my conversion, the Church has given me the faith and hope to cope with life's many challenges.

Members of my family were blessed to meet Pope John Paul II, one of the truly great saints of our time. I vividly remember 1979, when Saint John Paul, in solidarity with the Polish people, gave communion to more than 1 million Catholics in Warsaw, nourishing their faith and encouraging their determination to live in truth. He set a fire of liberty that led to the freedom of Poland and the end of Soviet domination.

I have witnessed the power of God, through His church, to touch lives and transform the world—both on the world stage and in my own heart. The church has grounded me and my beliefs in a deep way of thinking about mercy, penance and the dignity and potential of every life, young and old, rich and poor, born and not yet born.

The power of that Catholic faith can be seen today, not only in the crowds that will greet Pope Francis in the coming days, but in the millions of men and women who heal the sick, comfort the lonely, work for peace and feed the hungry. It is a faith that touches heart and mind, and it brings comfort to all who listen to its message of hope. And it is a faith that I am proud to call my own.

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