

Pope's US Visit to Focus on Needs of Poor

Pope Francis was to due to arrive in the United States on Tuesday bearing a message that the power and wealth that Washington symbolizes should be made to serve humanity, and not the other way around.

The Argentine-born leader of the world's 1.2 billion member Roman Catholic church arrives in the U.S. capital from Cuba, where he urged a continued reconciliation between the Communist-run island and its superpower neighbor, building on a new detente he helped to broker earlier this year.

The first Latin American pope's decision to go from Cuba to the world's most powerful and richest nation is freighted with symbolism as he pushes the Church to pay greater heed to people who live on the . President Barack Obama was to greet the pontiff when his plane lands at Joint Base Andrews on Tuesday. They meet again on Wednesday at the White House, after which the 78-year-old pope will parade past major monuments before a crowd expected to number well into the tens of thousands.

Hundreds of steel crowd-control fences and dozens of portable toilets had been put in place by Tuesday morning near the Washington Monument along the route and Vatican flags hung on light poles.

The pope has electrified liberal-leaning U.S. Catholics with his shift in emphasis toward forgiveness and concern for the poor. But he has also dismayed some conservative followers with comments of concern over climate change and a pivot away from messages focused on the church's ban on birth control and opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage.

Francis, on his first visit to the United States, was also

expected to talk about immigration, a top issue for him since his first days as pope in 2013.

Immigration has become a hot-button topic during early stages of the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign with Republican front-runner Donald Trump and other candidates proposing building a wall along the border to stem crossings and ending birthright citizenship.

“He’s bringing to the fore some of the most important issues of the day facing humanity, focusing on the dignity of the person, the dignity of all persons,” said Elizabeth Defeis, professor of international law at Seton Hall University and an advisor to the Holy See’s permanent observer mission to the United Nations.

“He is such a popular figure, and the combination of his charisma and the platform that he will be speaking from will help bring all these issues to the forefront,” Defeis said.

Francis was also likely to be criticized for the Church’s handling of a scandal over clergy sex abuse of minors and its treatment of gay, lesbian and transgender Catholics.

A poll released on Monday showed that 51 percent of Americans viewed Francis favorably, with just 9 percent of respondents to a an MSNBC/Telemundo/Marist poll reporting an unfavorable view.

Francis’ visit will also include the first address by any pope to the U.S. Congress on Thursday, a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday and an open-air Mass in Philadelphia where 1.5 million people were expected to attend.

A massive security presence is planned in all three cities, with special measures in place across 4.5 square miles of Philadelphia on Sunday.

“This is going to be one of the largest lifts in the nation’s history for national security events,” James Yacone, assistant director of the FBI’s Critical Incident Response Group, told reporters this week. “That all has to be very skillfully thought out – how we’re going to protect him, allow access of the public at different venues, and do it in such a manner that law enforcement can screen as many people as possible to keep it secure.”

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