

# *Pope Francis Online*

commemorating the

## **World Meeting of Families 2015 & Apostolic Journey to the USA**

commentaries by

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[www.semcasual.org](http://www.semcasual.org)

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## A mountaintop experience in Center City (8-7-15)

When Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus onto Mt. Tabor to experience the Transfiguration, their reactions were understandable. There we see interesting parallels to what we expect to happen when the pope visits center city Philadelphia next month!



Seeing the vision of the bedazzled Jesus along with Elijah and Moses, Peter exclaimed “it is good we are here!” When Pope Francis appears in Philadelphia, it will certainly be good to be there. Just ask the 13,000+ people from numerous countries who are traveling here from around the world to attend the WMOF Congress, or the 8,000+ volunteers from all 50 U.S. states, or the millions more who will be attending the papal events – they’re all coming to Philadelphia because it will be good to be here for this unprecedented event.

Yes, some may look upon the mammoth logistical and security decisions as signs of a popeacocalypse! The disciples on that mountaintop were also “terrified,” and rightly so as what they were experiencing was unlike anything they had ever known. But what a privilege they had to see what they saw. What excitement in their minds and hearts. What a revelation for their lives. This is the potential that the papal visit holds for all who journey to Philadelphia. It’s not the same thing, of course, but to be in the presence of Pope Francis is a moving experience that no description can adequately portray.

Perhaps that uniqueness is why the Lord instructed the disciples “not to relate what they had seen to anyone” and why “they kept the matter to themselves.” That vision is not aptly described. That experience is too unbelievable. That moment is not easily shared. Not, that is, until and unless one sees with the eyes of faith. After the Resurrection, they knew what that moment on Mt. Tabor meant. And the Gospels continue to tell the story.

Still, it must have been hard to keep that secret! Were there witnesses on the mountaintop today, they would have snapped photos for Facebook and Instagram, Tweeted what the voice from the cloud said, and perhaps captured the whole episode on Periscope with live-streaming video. The world would have known instantly what was going on.

Real-time communications via social media is what will be happening in Philadelphia, with the whole world watching. Not unlike Peter and James and John, many “disciples” have an opportunity to be there in the moment, to experience the maddening yet exciting events, and to communicate the story to friends and strangers alike.



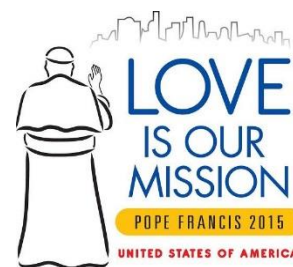
*click on the image for more information*

The World Meeting of Families is looking for 400 volunteers to assist with media relations. We need support staff, guides, and escorts for the more than 7,000 journalists who will be on site. We need social media volunteers who will create and monitor content on- and off-site. Sign on with WMOF and who knows ... maybe you, too, will have a mountain top experience right in the midst of center city!

*featured image cropped from hisgloryinourstory.com*

## How to hear Pope Francis: A Guide (8-14-15)

With preparations ramping up for the papal visit, much of the attention has centered on concerns about security and transportation. But the real focal point of this apostolic journey are the speeches Pope Francis will make at various sites. It would help, then, to know how to hear what he will say.



Not all do! Some mistake his words in a way that creates a narrative extrinsic to the pope's mission. Some hear him through the filter of a personal or collective agenda of what they wish he would say. Case in point: the [ongoing narrative](#) that appears to pit Pope Francis against Archbishop Chaput. The story repetitiously confuses a pastoral attitude of "welcoming" people with the ecclesial truth of witnessing to the faith. Properly understood, the two work together. Curiously, the story has since been "[scrubbed](#)" without being corrected!

To mitigate such misinterpretation, here are three tips to guide listeners and readers in preparation for the pope's numerous talks:

(1) *Consider where he is coming from.* Pope Francis comes to the USA as a head of state, where his talks to Congress and the United Nations will certainly garner international attention. He also comes as head of the Roman Catholic Church, and will speak often to bishops, priests, religious, seminarians, and all the faithful.

In both cases he speaks primarily as pastor, not as a diplomat or CEO. [In this visitation](#), he speaks as a way of being near and encountering people. Any other implications, applications, or supplications are secondary to his speaking as shepherd to his flock. As [Steve Soukup](#) rightly states, "There is no question that some of the things he says and does are likely to influence political matters. But that influence is ancillary to his principal aim, which is to minister to his Church and to ameliorate the suffering caused by man's surrender to sin."

(2) *Consider what he hopes to achieve.* When the pope as pastor communicates, his goal is loftier than secular speeches. He seeks to teach and to inspire humanity to become who we are called to be. No doubt he'll offer analysis of current culture, but his expertise is neither economic nor scientific.

Pope Francis will speak with the authority of his office. But his is a moral more than political might, whose effectiveness lies in exhorting and uplifting the dignity of human beings. His will certainly be a powerful voice, whether as inspiration to those who agree with him or as a different view to be considered by those who disagree. Either way, his words seek to be helpful and will be if listened to with an open mind and heart.

(3) *Consider what he actually says!* The pope's many words will undoubtedly be subject to analysis and critique, especially with thousands of journalists in tow. And while official texts will be available, this pope is well known for going off script, where his quips and quotes generate headlines.

Whether in verbal or written form, his words (not those of others about him) are what matter most. Listening to them or reading them requires attentiveness to what he actually says (not to what others say he said).



Pope Francis is beloved because he speaks to people and with them. His words tend to [favor commonly held truisms over accurate comparisons](#). But that is how he touches us precisely where we live, both where we sin and where we succeed. It's an encounter worth having ... through speeches worth listening to!

## The (New) Pilgrim's Journey (8-21-15)

According to Wikipedia, “In the early 21st century the numbers of people of all faiths making pilgrimages has continued to rise, with 39 of the most popular sites alone receiving an estimated 200 million visitors every year.” This September in Philly may add 1-2 million to that total!



The numbers flocking to the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection loom large. The World Meeting of Families will host a Congress of record proportions. The visit of Pope Francis will swell the two-day population even more.

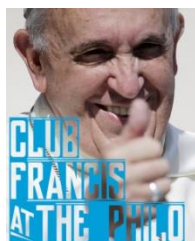
Some may think this is reason enough to say away from the heavily-secured city. But no pilgrimage happens without a few bumps along the way. The effort it takes is part of the experience. The energy needed comes more from within. The graces to be received are the benefit.

What will take place in September is not simply an international gathering. It's more than the appearance of a global celebrity. For one week, and one weekend, a pilgrimage is happening. The journey is a sacred one, for it focuses on the celebration of faith and the quintessentially spiritual and familial dimensions to human life. As Archbishop Chaput presciently puts it, this can be [“an irreplaceable moment in history.”](#) Let it be so both for the city, for the archdiocese, and for the pilgrims.

Like most pilgrimages this one will be inundated with young people, whose energy and enthusiasm are rarely thwarted by the prospects of long walks and big crowds. Today, though, these pilgrims will have another staple in the traveling packs – social media. Tweets, posts, photos, streaming video – this is new arsenal for young pilgrims. Thankfully, anyone with access will be able to share in the holy happenings by tapping into the social boards at work during the events. (*click on the image below for info*)



And for the youth on pilgrimage in Philly, an actual, not just virtual, opportunity awaits. Bands and speakers, along with food and fun, will be available at [“Club Francis @ the Philo”](#) from September 22-24. Plans are still being developed to make this a real opportunity to connect in person ... and to encounter others who seek to make this pilgrimage a special moment.



Whether with hashtags or with hangouts, the pilgrimage will soon be underway. To echo the Archbishop's appeal: “we need to own that spirit by welcoming [Pope Francis] with our presence and our personal involvement, not just with our words. And we can do that best by joining him here in the city — on Independence Mall, at the Festival of Families, and on the parkway for his Sunday Mass. *It's worth it. It will be spectacular. So please join us – and tell everyone you meet to do the same.*”

*featured image from [www.sjprep.org/page.cfm?p=927](http://www.sjprep.org/page.cfm?p=927)*



## Social Communications & the Family (8-28-15)

At the inaugural [Cardinals' Forum](#) this week, we enjoyed a lively discussion on the vocation and mission of the family. With reference to communications, I suggested that the family would benefit from a new viewpoint!

Digital technology is much more than newfangled gadgetry. It serves as our culture's "connective tissue" or "nervous system." Even if we do not use it extensively, everything around us is filtered through media: our news, sports, politics, even our daily interactions with family and friends. So, just as we are not always aware of the critical role that tissue and nerves play in our physical lives – until something hurts, that is! – so too the workings of this digital environment are such that without it, our lives would, in some real sense, fall apart.

Social communications permeate all aspects of contemporary life. Even the Holy Father recognizes this, when he calls the modern media "essential," particularly for young people. Getting parents to acknowledge this reality, rather than avoid it or flee from it, is a first step in the family's mission.

A second step is to embrace fully the Holy Father's call "to employ technology wisely, rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it" ([World Communications Day, 2015](#)). This distinction acknowledges that social media can be "both a help and a hindrance to communication in and between families." Parents, especially, need to keep both in mind. Yes, significant dangers exist in the realm of social media, just as risks are part of every facet of growing up. Children "cannot be left to their own devices" – either figuratively or literally! But once parents accept that the iWorld is the environment in which they and their children live, then they can take advantage of this as an opportunity to engage more fully with what their children are texting and posting and sharing ... they might even learn a thing or two from them!



The third and final step is to affirm the ultimately spiritual purpose of communications. In his latest encyclical, the Holy Father notes that an integrated human ecology requires us "to live wisely, to think deeply, and to love generously" when it comes to media and the digital world ([Laudato Si'](#), n. 47). The family is where this integration is taught and learned.

The family offers a wisdom that comes from inter-personal encounters. For this to flourish, we should learn to put down the gadgets when other people are in the same room. Living beings in our presence should matter much more than whatever draws our attention on a screen.

The family teaches that relationships are stronger than individual differences. For this to develop, we should remember that connections mediated by social networks involve real, not virtual, people. The way we interact online, in what we say and what we post, needs to respect this with familial charity.

And the family is where the sharing of knowledge and affection is cultivated. Technology offers exciting prospects by making possible new ways of interacting with an ever-wider world. But true admiration and affection will always be directed toward persons we love, those we encounter in the human family that is our origin and in the Christian family that is our community.

Acknowledging, embracing, and integrating social communications are critical steps in [the mediating mission of the family today](#). In this realm lies a significant challenge for the entire Church. To quote the Holy Father one last time: "may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God" ([World Communications Day, 2014](#)).





## We are “Roman” Catholics (9-7-15)

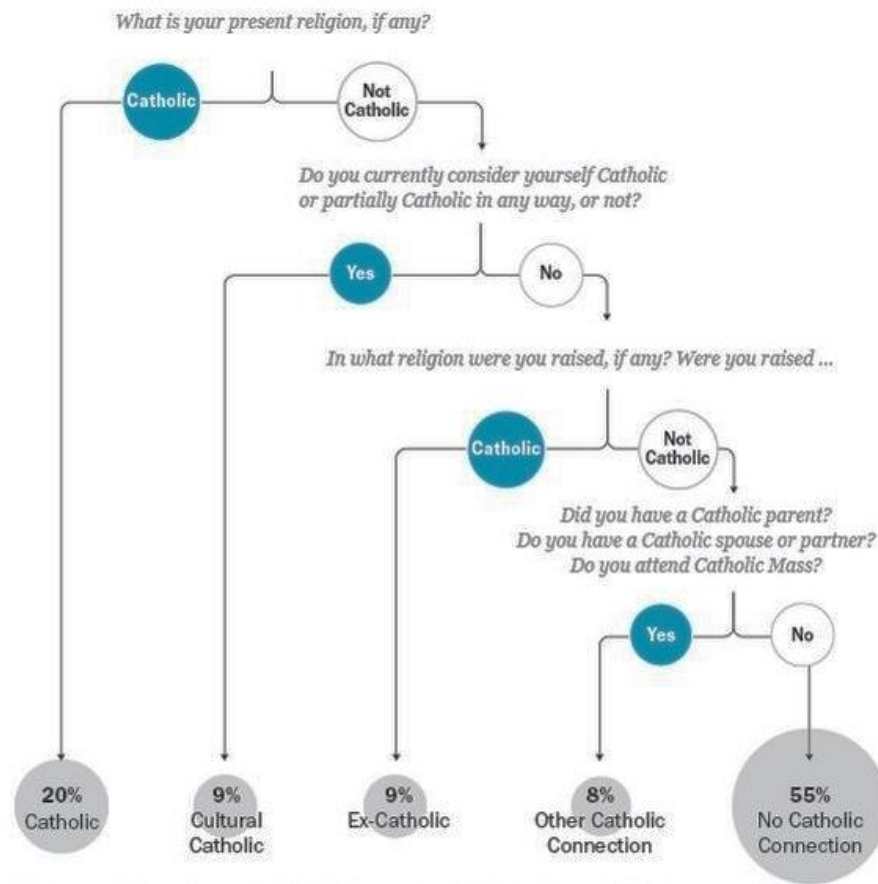
In advance of the papal visit to the USA and the [World Meeting of Families](#), the [PEW Research Center](#) published a new survey last week. It offers “an in-depth look at American Catholics’ views on family life, sexuality and Catholic identity” – all topics of interest in the prevailing media narratives.

The results are not that surprising. But who the respondents are may be. The typical “Catholics” in this study include the “cradle” ones who’ve never left the Church (73%), those “returning” (17%), the “converted” (9%), and, of course, the “ex-Catholics” (Curiously, 1% of those surveyed didn’t know what they are!)

But other groupings also appear. With a [new nomenclature](#) the poll identifies “partial” Catholics, [“cultural Catholics.”](#) and folks who are “Catholic-connected.” Catholicism, it seems, is now a matter of background (upbringing), affinity (of viewpoints), or other links.

## Nearly Half of U.S. Adults Have Close Connection to Catholicism

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Source: Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Catholics and Family Life, May 5–June 7, 2015.  
See questionnaire for exact question wording and question order. RELIG, QJ1, QH3, QJ9, QH6, QJ5  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Unfortunately, the new lingo leaves out an important adjective: *Roman* Catholics. Knowing that term makes a difference. Recognizing that says something about the particularity of one's real religious identity. Appropriating that enables one to address *the* Catholic perspective on things.

To claim one is "Roman" Catholic is not to invoke an [official ecclesial name](#). It's not simply a geographical distinction (of the one Western Church compared to the twenty-three Eastern Churches subject to the pope). Nor is it formally a governmental designation (of the legal entity properly known as the Holy See). Nor is it primarily a liturgical distinction (of the Latin rite of worship).

In terms of religious identity, to be "Roman" Catholic is a matter of perspective, outlook, viewpoint, or vision. To be Catholic recognizes that Catholicism has a center, that its beliefs coalesce around a common point of reference. Of course, that center point is Jesus Christ.

But in this world that center has a local address – in Rome, where the Vatican is located (with its distinct international boundary) and where the Vicar of Christ resides. This is who Pope Francis is!

From Rome the pope carries out his apostolic ministry. That ministry, exercised collegially by the bishops whom the pope appoints, is how the teaching of Jesus is handed down in succession from the earliest days of the Church. That is how the center reaches out to the peripheries and addresses the lives of believers in today's world. In Philadelphia, this is what Archbishop Chaput does.

Consequently, the media narratives that compare the [pope to the people](#) or pit the [pope against the archbishop](#) make no sense in the *Roman* Catholic world. Catholic identity is not expressed in, or shaped by, popular viewpoints or polling numbers. Catholic identity is far more than cultural affinity or familial connection.

To be Catholic is to accept and profess a specific religious faith, authoritatively defined in [the teachings](#) that emanate from Rome (at least metaphorically). Magisterial teachings may vary in significance about what is divinely revealed, definitively taught, or ordinarily taught. Adherence to them may vary in type – whether by faith, by assent, or by religious submission. Opinions about these teachings may differ, but in all cases, the properly Catholic faith includes *all* that is authentically taught by the pope and bishops.

"Roman" may not be an adjective used in polls about Catholicism. But as a term identifying who those believers are and the faith that unites them, we are Roman Catholics.

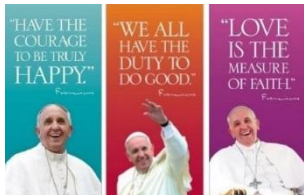
*featured image from [www.cathnewsusa.com](http://www.cathnewsusa.com)*

# #PopeInPhilly @ #WMF 2015

(9-18-15)



*The time has come!*



The Festival grounds have been identified and mapped; they will certainly be secured. [Transportation](#) routes have been laid out. Banners have been hung. And the golden hues of the "papal mums" are beginning to dot the landscape.

Tickets have been allotted, distributed, and picked up. Ticket holders are already anticipating their presence at the events with holy enthusiasm.



Speakers have been lined up and schedules arranged. The vast array of wisdom to be shared at the two congresses and related activities of the World Meeting of Families 2015 is world-class.

Related events have been booked and promoted. A [film festival](#), a [panel discussion](#), a [club](#) for young adults, a [museum tour](#), a [constitutional exhibit](#), [mural arts](#), and [Vatican Splendors](#) await the throngs of visitors about to descend on Philadelphia. And they will be entertained by renowned artists and performers.



Media messages have been crafted. Background information of all types has been distributed. Even a ["decoding Francis"](#) guide has been made available. The almost daily press releases will continue. And mass media stand ready to broadcast the festival to the world, while [social media](#) will connect the world to Philly.

Yes, the first of the souvenir stores has already opened its doors. And there's even a [guide to good food and drink](#)!



*The World Meeting of Families 2015 begins on Tuesday, and concludes with the visit of Pope Francis on Saturday and Sunday!*





Now, just two things are needed -- in addition to plenty of patience while dealing with the the inevitable glitches that will occur.

The first is to give THANKS ... to the countless multitudes of people, in every imaginable line of work, who have contributed generously and tirelessly to this project. Without them, this once-in-a-lifetime happening would not have been possible.

The second is to PRAY -- "invoking the light and strength of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary Most Holy" -- for families here and around the world, for the visiting pilgrims from near and far, for the event staff and volunteers, for the city, for the Church, and especially for the Pope. He comes on this apostolic journey to be with us, to teach and inspire us, and to accompany us on the way of faith and hope and love.

***Buon viaggio, Papa Francesco! ... and Welcome Holy Father.***



## The Obnoxious Pope (9-20-15)

Preparations for the Pope's visit to Philadelphia ran into one snag last week. Actually, [the snag ran into him](#). In Love Park, where people gathered around the "[pop up pope](#)" last week, a young teenager on a skateboard rammed the cardboard cutout and tackled the figurative pope. His explanation: "the pope ain't done nothin' for me."

It may seem odd that one would take out his ire about the pope by assaulting a figurine. Then again, today's first reading reveals the thinking: "Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us" (Wisdom 2:12). Apparently, Pope Francis is obnoxious! Indeed, he is. As is evident in editorials (even one from the otherwise brilliant [George Will](#)), Pope Francis rankles folks in every arena: political, economic, ecological, and religious. This phenomenon is nothing new. Good and just and holy people do tend to bother us ... and they should!

When one speaks the truth contrary to what we desire, when he challenges the status quo of what has long been believed, when he upsets our complacent sense that life is good just as it is, he disturbs our comfort zone. No one likes that. Most will dismiss it. Others will disagree with it. Some may even despise it.

This, we know, is precisely, how the majority of people reacted to Jesus. They could not accept what he said. They could not bear what he did. But they didn't assault a pop-up Jesus. They nailed him to a cross. And that's why today's Gospel message (Mark 9:30-37) is so radical, and the gesture there so meaningful.

Jesus forthrightly claims that "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him." Of course the disciples couldn't understand and were afraid to question him. That statement runs counter to their tradition. It upsets centuries of thinking about the Messiah. Yet, as we know, this was no mere prediction, but a proclamation of how God would save the world and make our Redemption happen.

Then, with a child as a prophetic prop, Jesus further overturned the common worldview concerning greatness. Children are not great by any means. They haven't accomplished anything. They have yet to grow up. They remain totally dependent on others. To welcome a child requires a new vision. It means accepting one who is totally needy. It means putting the child's needs ahead of one's own preferences, as every parent knows. It means considering and treating another person as more important to me than I am to myself. That's Gospel greatness.

Today, and every Sunday, we gather in church to give thanks for this Gospel message, because it portrays well how God treats us. We remember that we are all God's children, even we who are grownups. As children, we see that greatness lies not in our own accomplishments, but in the act of being cared for. God the Father so loves the His children, despite our many childish failings, that he gave his Son to die for us and to rise again to bring us to eternal life – the greatest success of all.

This, in the end, is the message of Pope Francis. He does have a rock-star personality, as the Francis Festival will demonstrate. He is a visiting head of state, with all the attendant protocols. But POPE Francis journeys to the USA as the Vicar of Christ, the one chosen and appointed to speak the Gospel in our age. So, when he arrives this week, listen closely! What he says is likely to be obnoxious – in a good sense! – because he will speak with the boldness of the Gospel and the righteousness of faith. He will challenge us to be better than we are. He will invite us to Gospel greatness, by serving others in need. Hopefully, no one will actually try to tackle the pope! But for his safety, and for blessings upon his visit, let us pray.

# Getting Ready for a Global Event (9-21-15)

*The buzz has begun!*

Highway notices are flashing warnings about finding alternate routes. City streets have been closed to allow free movement to scores of workers. Cars are already being towed out of the way. The famed Philadelphia police horses stand ready for action.



Today the registration for the World Meeting of Families 2015 opened. Families of varying nationalities can be seen walking the downtown streets. Languages of other countries are easily overheard. Bags of promotional goodies are totted with joy.

Staff, too, are busily at work putting all the final touches in place. Volunteers glad in bright orange point and smile. Exhibitors sweat and toil over boxes and monitors and displays and routers.

Journalists have begun their daily jaunt to the press filing center; there the mobile offices await visiting crews, while the big screen monitors run their test signals. Laptops are loaded and tablets in use as the media pour over the papal words looking for an angle to report.



But for this event, readiness is not just a matter of preparation or set-up. The air is now different, as are the people all around.

Yes, the participants are anticipating with joy an inspiring Congress on family life and a unique visit from the Holy Father. But others play a big part, too.

The train conductor who smiles at the special railway pass you produce; the people on the streets who glance at you with a look that says they know why you're here; the passers-by who offer to help you with transporting heavy loads; the city-dwellers who wish you a wonderful week with your beloved church leader — these are the people of the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection. They're making it clearly known that they, too, recognize the special occasion that brings the most popular person on the planet right here to Philadelphia.

The pope may still be in Cuba, but the advent of his coming is already having a powerful effect on one and all.

*Let the World Meeting begin!*



## From unity to anarchy (9-22-25)

With notable “openings,” the World Meeting of Families (#WMF2015) is underway.

The opening press conference stressed the unity of the organizers, both the host (Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia) and the sponsor (Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family). Despite the beleaguering narrow-mindedness of some reporters’ inquiries, both archbishops spoke to the focus of the week ahead, namely, a reaffirmation of the central and fundamental place of the family in the life of a society and its culture. More than just a PR front, the focus on the family was evident in the halls, where people diverse in color and language and place of origin were unified by their love of, and concern for, the family.



The opening ceremony showed off the unity of congress organizers and city officials. They kicked off the week with music and merriment. They impressed upon all present the way that this event unites the “world” by ticking off the places of origin and miles traveled by a number of families.

(image: [www.phillymag.com](http://www.phillymag.com))

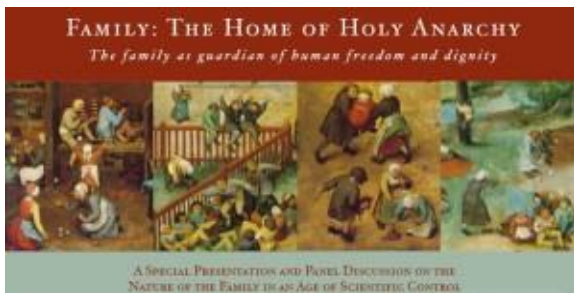
The opening keynote address highlighted the unity of human life as constituted by the Creator. Made “in the image and likeness of God” each human being shares in the mission to live out that image in relation to one another.

(image: Mary Colleen Romendio)



That relationality was on full display as a unity of faith in the celebration of the opening Mass. With sights and sounds befitting a world at worship, the Mass provided a living experience of the family of the Church.

Then came the anarchy. No, the vast crowds did not take to the streets of downtown Philly like a vengeful mob.



Instead, the public was invited to explore the idea of the family as a holy anarchy. Offering a provocative presentation to begin the discussion, noted French philosopher Fabrice Hadjadj pointed out how the family precedes and extends beyond the law; all individuals owe their existence to a family. Unlike the operation of a factory, what transpires in a family is not produced or

controlled. The family partakes in mystery; it is the source of transcendental wonder, not a problem to be solved by reasoned manipulation. Therein lies the family’s opening to holiness.

From unity to anarchy — the family knows it all.

## Good morning, USA! (9-23-15)

Just two words from Pope Francis ... but they say so much more.

Fr. Antonio Spadaro once pointed out how two words (“good evening”) spoken from the loggia of St. Peter’s basilica created a “communication event” by drawing the enormous audience into the familiar realm of the newly-elected Pope Francis. Now those in the USA are part of that discourse.



With reading glasses firmly perched against the wind, Pope Francis delivered his first speech on U.S. soil in response to the President’s welcome. For all the concern about the Pope’s not knowing English, the talk was both correct and congenial. (Whoever taught him pronunciation did a stellar job!)

Public speaking is, itself, unnerving. Doing so in a foreign language is much more difficult. Doing so in front of the secular world’s potentates, and with eyes and ears the world over focused on every word — that’s way beyond daunting.

But Pope Francis keeps it all in proper perspective. He has come to the USA not as an orator, but as a pastor. His visit is all about his presence, not his performance.

Given the linguistic challenge, he focused intently on the text, not looking up and seemingly oblivious to the interrupting applause. But his Italian roots shone through in the gestures that accompanied his words.

The pope’s passion underscores his speaking. The meaningfulness of his message extends beyond the meaning of his words. It is to people — his people in the Church and all people of good will — that Pope Francis directs his message and offers his repeated encouragement.

The flag-waving, hand-shaking, photo-taking crowds that surround the pope during his visit know that they are part of his communication event. Now hearing him in our own language, we will be enamored by what he says – perhaps even to the point of tears — because he is HERE speaking all this to US.

Beginning with “Good morning” draws us in. Ending with “God bless America” rouses us to cheer. The expressions are everyday utterances for us. For Pope Francis to speak them so flawlessly and comfortably connects him to us and us to him in a bond bigger than speech.

The only line he missed was “play ball!” after the national anthem!

*(featured image of the Pope’s gift to the President, courtesy of the Vatican Press Office)*





## Everything bogs down in DC (9-24-15)

We were poised in the media center for the first ever papal address to Congress, which was scheduled for 9:20 a.m. A country awaited.

But first Pope Francis had to shake hands with more children outside the nunciature where he stayed. And he had to have a private meeting with the host, Speaker John Boehner. And he had to be preceded by a slew of named Representatives and Senators who would officially “escort” him into the chambers. Everything bogs down in DC.

Finally, a few minutes after 10:00, “Pope Francis of the Holy See” began his address. The first standing ovation came after the first sentence! At least nine more would follow at various points during the address. The pope’s invocation of his [“Fantastic Four” Americans](#) was further interrupted multiple times by applause. The pope appeared to be energized by this. He also would be late.



The five-page speech took fifty minutes to complete. The impressions formed by his presence, his words, and even the unified politeness of his audience will last much longer. Nevertheless, another talk was to be given; another audience was waiting. And now he’s late for lunch.

One would think that punctuality would be valued more by a man who champions virtuous living. With all the details pre-arranged, with a number of handlers greater than any other celebrity, and with absolutely no traffic to create congestion, one would think the pope could stay on schedule.

But little is as one would think when Pope Francis comes to town. More to the point, it doesn’t need to be (with apologies to the organizers). For this pope lives the message he speaks. As he told Congress, his “duty is to build bridges.” He seeks “dialogue” often and everywhere. And so he reaches across the aisles politically, and he reaches across the barriers personally. He touches all people, figuratively and sometimes literally.

When the pope does this, time fades in importance. People come first. They are why he is here — not just the people in reserved seats for his talks, but those who stand for hours on end just to watch and listen, as well as those who line the secured parade routes just to see him and wave.

Yes, things bog down in D.C. But this time nobody cares! Pope Francis will, eventually, get where he needs to go. American Airlines will not depart without him. And when Pope Francis finally gets to Philadelphia, the record number of participants in the World Meeting of Families will be joined by a million others. To them all the pope will speak. Many he will greet.

The planners have scheduled in Philly the only outdoor events on the pope’s itinerary. The city is working feverishly to clear the way. The talks may start on time, but probably not — and no one will be bothered, least of all the pope who came to be among his people. Then again, if Pope Francis does need to pick up the pace, he could use the special gift that Mayor Nutter is giving him:



*(featured image: CNS/Paul Haring)*

## Walk a mile in the pope's shoes (9-25-15)

Actually, it's 1.2 miles (one way). And we used our own shoes to hoof it back from the parking garage of the neighboring hospital, where this morning we had to move our cars.



Preparations for the visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia have kicked into high gear. Many streets in center city are cordoned off; one downtown train station is completely closed. Fencing is everywhere! And concrete barriers stand behind that.

At Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, where Pope Francis is staying over on Saturday night, security is already in lockdown mode. The U.S. Secret Service and the Vatican Swiss Guard are on site and on alert. The National Guard are camped out across the street. The flashing red and blue lights of township police vehicles can be seen all around the campus. And the seminary residents have been given their marching orders for the weekend — or, more accurately, their stay inside orders.



*(photo: Nicholas Mancini)*



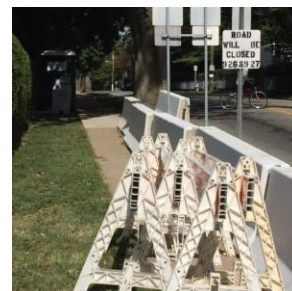
Thousands of people are expected to line the neighborhood streets in hopes of getting a glimpse of the Holy Father as he comes and goes. Hundreds more will be inside the gates, including the bishops from the World Meeting of Families as well as the faculty, staff and students of the seminary, all of whom will be in the grand St. Martin's Chapel to hear a special address by the pope.

But there are so many more people behind the scenes who are critical players in this dramatic visit: from food service employees to maintenance crews to janitorial staff inside the seminary, to the police officers and fire fighters and medical personnel and all the local government officials outside the property.

All these people, too, are walking — at least figuratively — in the pope's shoes. Their work — selfless yet impassioned, not publicized but not taken for granted — makes it possible for Pope Francis to travel to sites never before visited and to do what he does best: accompany his people.

Is the hassle of parking elsewhere and having to walk around closed streets inconvenient? Definitely! Is the pain more bearable because of the excitement? Probably!

But if people want to enter fully into the pope's visit, we would do well to see the extraordinary measures in a different light. For many people, life is not convenient. For most, there are far more significant trials and tribulations.



Walking a couple of miles and wading through boisterous crowds is hardly a crisis or something to lament. It could be an occasion of grace, if we grow in empathy for those who really suffer in a serious way. It will be a time of blessing, if we grow in gratitude for this unique opportunity.

In this light, let us rejoice ... Pope Francis is (almost) here!



## A Campaign for Marriage (9-26-15)

Not everyone was with #PopeInPhilly on this magnificent Saturday. Two young people, along with their families and friends, were instead putting into action the joy of the Gospel of which Pope Francis so often speaks. Today was their wedding day.

Different places and different crowds, but [the campaign theme](#) is the same: “I’ll be there.” It’s what Pope Francis said he was coming to Philadelphia to do ... be there for us. It’s what husband and wife mean by their lives ... be there for each other.



“I’ll be there” — it’s a promise spouses make, a choice that binds them together. Many in our culture think it’s a foolish choice or an impossible one to make. But by saying “I’ll be there” for you, two people can courageously decide the rest of their lives now, ahead of time. Doing so makes them free, for it gives each of them utter confidence and total certainty for the future that lies ahead.

“I’ll be there” — it’s a promise that love trumps everything. Many young people today think that love results from like, that happiness leads to love. By first promising each other “I’ll be there,” the young who marry reverse that equation. They tell the world that love is the starting point for making one happy, not its conclusion. Once they decide to be there for each other in love, no matter what (“in good times and in bad”), then everything else in their lives will fit into its proper place.

“I’ll be there” — it’s a promise that draws the couple into the realm of God. That’s why marriage is celebrated fittingly in church, where God is present and is able to be experienced. “I’ll be there” is a simple summary of the message of salvation. God has been there: to create us and to redeem us. God promises us (again) to be there always: in the grace the couple needs to make marriage flourish, and through them as a sacrament to the world that needs so desperately to see what love really means.

“I’ll be there” is what more than a million people will make true for one day in Philadelphia, when they come to see Pope Francis tomorrow. “I’ll be there” is what a married couple makes true each and every day, when they look upon each other as the love of their lives.

On both accounts, we have reason to celebrate.

*(excerpted from the homily for the marriage of David Spadt & Dana Fish  
at St. Anthony of Padua parish in Ambler, PA)*

# He came, he spoke, he conquered.

## (10-2-15)

Of his swift and definitive victory in battle, Julius Caesar famously said: *veni, vidi, vici*. That same sentiment holds true for Pope Francis, though his peaceful battle was waged with words upon the minds and hearts of those in “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

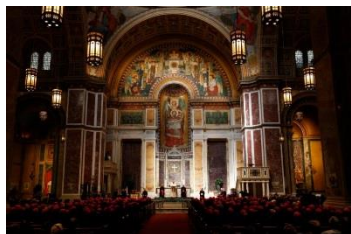


[Highlights](#) of #PopeInUSA have been aggregated. [Reflections](#) on the papal visit highlight a miraculous encounter. [Commemorative media](#) are now available. Even [cultural scorecards](#) have been filled out.

But, as the euphoria subsides and the Festival grounds return to normal city life, the question of victory lingers. Will the words and gestures of Pope Francis inspire a lasting change in our lives? Only time will tell.

Pope Francis spoke in lofty exhortations (on religious freedom or an integrated human ecology) and with weighty considerations (of the death penalty, of a person-centered economy) to a wide range of audiences.

Amid these inspiring thoughts, he also offered specific challenges to men and women who work in the Church and whose mission is to lead others to become who we are as Church.



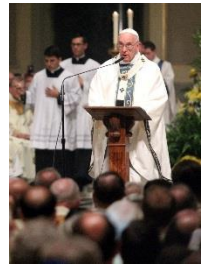
(1) To bishops gathered in Washington, he said: “It (being pastors) is not about preaching complicated doctrines, but joyfully proclaiming Christ who died and rose for our sake. The ‘style’ of our mission should make our hearers feel that the message we preach is meant *‘for us’*. Will we learn to give people joy? If we do not make them smile at the Good News that the Gospel offers to them, we cannot win their minds or hearts.

(2) To bishops in Philadelphia, he said: “We need to invest our energies not so much in rehearsing the problems of the world around us and the merits of Christianity, but in extending a sincere invitation to young people to be brave and to opt for marriage and the family.” Will we challenge young people to live the faith well, particularly in married life? The beauty of covenantal love, the truth of human relations, and the goodness of the family are what every generation desires. But first they need to be called toward it by their elders.



(3) To clergy and religious in New York, he said: “A grateful heart is spontaneously impelled to serve the Lord and to find expression in a life of commitment to our work. Once we come to realize how much God has given us, a life of self-sacrifice, of working for him and for others, becomes a privileged way of responding to his great love.” How joyful do men and women in the ordained and consecrated life appear to others? Vocations will follow when we get busy about being happy.

(4) And to the bishops, clergy, and religious of Pennsylvania, he said: “Our challenge today is to build on those solid foundations and to foster a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in planning for the future of our parishes and institutions.” Will we not simply allow, but actually enable and positively encourage the laity to use their unique gifts in building up the Church for the Kingdom of God?



The Holy Father contextualized that last challenge with the simple, direct, and hopefully inspiring question: *“What about you?”* It’s a question implicit in every other talk he gave. It’s a question subtly addressed to each of the audiences and to everyone else who heard him. It’s a question intended for all in the Church. It’s *the* question that seeks to conquer our lives.

The answer – as well as the victory about which Pope Francis came and spoke – now awaits our individual and collective response.

*photos from Catholic News Service at CatholicPhilly.com*