Pope Francis Welcomes Trump to Vatican

Kayla Pantano (May 24, 2017)

Two of the West's most influential leaders, President Donald Trump and Pope Francis, set aside their differences for a private 30-minute meeting on international affairs and the promotion of peace.

Pope Francis [2] welcomed President Trump [3] to the Vatican [4] on Wednesday morning, a highly anticipated first face-to-face meeting of the two leaders. Though they previously publicly clashed over immigration policies, Trump later described their meeting as "great" and "fantastic" to the Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni [5] at Villa Taverna [6], the residence of the US ambassador to Rome.

The 13th President to Visit the Vatican

Trump arrived just after 8 am local time, accompanied by his wife, Melania [7], and eldest daughter, Ivanka [8], the former honoring her host nation by wearing Italian label Dolce and Gabbana [9]. His senior advisor, Jared Kushner [10]; Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson [11]; National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster [12]; White House Director of Social Media Dan Scavino [13]: and Hope Hicks [14],

Trump's longest-serving political aide, were also present.

Francis greeted Trump in Sala del Tronetto, the room of the little throne, on the second floor of Apostolic Palace. When the men shook hands, Trump said, "It is a great honor to be here." After posing for photographs, they moved into the Pope's private study joined only by an interpreter. Francis, in white papal dress with a pectoral cross on a chain around his neck, sat behind his desk while Trump, in a dark suit, white shirt, and navy striped tie, took the single chair across from him. The meeting ended a half hour later when Francis rang the bell.

According to a statement from the Vatican, the two held "cordial discussions" in "an exchange of views on various themes relating to international affairs and the promotion of peace in the world through political negotiation and interreligious dialogue, with particular reference to the situation in the Middle East and the protection of Christian communities."

It continued to read, "It is hoped that there may be serene collaboration between the state and the Catholic Church in the United States, engaged in service to the people in the fields of health care, education, and assistance to immigrants."

A Peaceful Parting

Following the talks, the Pontiff was introduced to members of Trump's delegation. As is tradition, the two then exchanged gifts. Francis gave Trump a medallion inscribed with an olive branch by a Roman artist as a symbol of peace, to which the President responded, "We can use peace." The Pope also presented him with three books, which he said he sends to all Catholics, on family, the joy of the Gospels, and the "care of our common home, the environment." He also handed out rosaries to members of Trump's retinue.

In return, the President gave the Pope a first-edition set of writings by Martin Luther King Jr. and a bronze sculpture titled "Rising Above" that the White House said "represents hope for a peaceful tomorrow." Upon their farewell, Trump said as they shook hands, "I will never forget what you said to me."

Trump's Quest to Promote Tolerance

Trump's visit to the cradle of Roman Catholicism follows stops in Saudi Arabia and Israel, capping a tour of the ancestral homes of three of the world's major religions in an effort to cooperate against extremism.

Prior to his encounter with the Italian Premier, he met Italian President Sergio Mattarella [15] at the Quirinal Palace [16]. At the end of the day, he left Rome to fly to Brussels. However, he is set to return to Italy but further south in Taormina, Sicily, for the G7 Summit [17] on May 26.

Moments before taking off for Brussels, Trump tweeted [18]: "Honor of a lifetime to meet His Holiness Pope Francis. I leave the Vatican more determined than ever to pursue PEACE in our world."

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