

Holy gift giving: What are Vatican guests giving Pope Francis?

Compiled by Catholic Review Staff

What gift would you give the pope? Gifts presented to Pope Francis at private audiences are carefully thought out, often with elements of cultural and diplomatic symbolism. U.S. President Barack Obama gave the pope a box containing wood from the Baltimore basilica March 27, a present which some say represented religious liberty.

Here's a peek at some of the traditions and gifts that are involved when a president, head of state or special guest meets Pope Francis:



(CNS photo/Maria Grazia Picciarella, pool)

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip presented to the pope a large basket of food from the estates surrounding her homes during a private audience at the Vatican April 3; the items included an assortment of honey, a dozen eggs, a “haunch of venison,” shortbread, juice, preserves, “Balmoral whiskey” and apple juice. Fulfilling a long-standing tradition, Queen Elizabeth also presented the pope with two signed, silver framed photographs of her and the Duke of Edinburgh, telling him, “I’m afraid I have to give you a photograph; it is inevitable.”



(CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano)

Pope Francis accepted mate, the traditional Argentine herbal tea, given as a gift by Argentina’s President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner at the Vatican March 18, 2013. Pope Francis was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina Dec. 17, 1936 to Italian immigrant parents.



(CNS photo/Stefano Spaziani, pool)

President Obama presented a gift to Pope Francis during a private audience at the Vatican March 27. The president gave the pope a blue box containing wood from the Baltimore basilica and a selection of fruit and vegetable seeds from the White House Garden. The wood points to the basilica as a symbol of religious liberty, Monsignor Valenzano, rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, said. “It’s a witness to what we believe.”

The gift was inspired by the pope's recent announcement that he would open the gardens of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo to the public. An inscription on the chest reads: "Presented to His Holiness Pope Francis by Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, March 27, 2014." According to the White House, Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's Virginia estate, will also donate to a charity of the pope's choice seeds "that will yield several tons of produce."



(CNS photo/L'Ossevatore Romano via Reuters)

With admiration and big smiles all around, the lifelong soccer fan Pope Francis met the star players and coaches of the Argentine and Italian national soccer teams during a private audience at the Vatican Aug. 13, 2013. Gianluigi Buffon, Italy's goalkeeper and captain, handed the pope a soccer ball as a gift. Pope Francis also asked the players to pray for him, "so that I too, on the 'field' where God has put me, can play an honest and courageous game for the good of all."



(CNS photo/Max Rossi, Reuters)

Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo gave the pope ebony statues during a meeting at the Vatican Oct. 25, 2013.



(CNS photo/Alessandro Bianchi, Reuters)

President Mauricio Funes Cartagena of El Salvador gifted Pope Francis a reliquary containing a blood-stained piece of the vestment of Archbishop Oscar Romero during a private audience at the Vatican May 23, 2013. Archbishop Romero was wearing the vestment when he was assassinated while celebrating Mass in 1980.



(CNS photo/Stefano Spaziani, pool)

Uruguay's President Mujica gave the pope a gift of three figurines dressed in the style of "gauchos," the traditional cowboys of Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay during a private audience at the Vatican June 1, 2013.

Also see what presents people are throwing to the pope while he rides in his popemobile.

