

# Pay close attention to pope's words and actions, papal nuncio says

WASHINGTON – Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the papal nuncio to the United States, gets plenty of questions about Pope Francis.

A March 27 discussion at Georgetown University, sponsored by the university's Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, was no exception. The nuncio, who sat onstage with John Carr, the initiative's director, was asked about the pope's key issues and his impact in the four years since his election.

Instead of emphasizing the pope's special qualities or accomplishments, Archbishop Pierre, who has been in the Vatican diplomatic corps for almost 40 years, stressed how Catholics are called to view the pope and essentially work with him in the mission of spreading the Gospel.

He told the audience, nearly filling a campus auditorium, that it is not a question of whether the pope is good or bad or if one agrees with him or not. The issue, for Catholics, is to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying through the pope.

"We have to pay a lot of attention to the person of the pope and to his message and to his testimony because the pope is not just words but he is also actions and actions that are powerful words," the nuncio said.

Archbishop Pierre, who was appointed to the U.S. post by Pope Francis last April, would not comment on the pope's approval ratings compared to politicians nor would he address the current political climate, but he stressed that one's personal faith can't be separated from daily life and that people need to use discernment even in civic duties like voting.

When asked about care for migrants in today's world, he said Christians should be the "soul of this country" and Catholics should follow the example of Pope Francis who goes out to the borders and reaches out to those who are broken and those who suffer.

"The church is in the business of evangelization," he added, saying this works best when the church "goes outside herself" to meet people where they are. And in a pointed statement to this country, he added: If America is the center of the world then it has "a huge responsibility to help others."

When the nuncio was joined on stage by other panelists, they reiterated the importance of the pope's message that has come across just as much from his actions as his words.

To sum up the pope's message to Catholics today, Ken Hackett, former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See and former president and CEO of Catholic Relief

Services, looks to the example of the pope's visit to the United States in 2015 where the pope's presence, in front of Congress and with the poor, and his words at each stop made Catholics proud of their faith.

Kim Daniels, a member of the Vatican's Secretariat for Communications, said the pope's message has resonated not just with Catholics but also with those who have heard him even through social media. She said he has made the call to live out one's faith "something that's concrete and not abstract" and something "we can do right here, right now, where we are."

For Maria Teresa Gaston, managing director of the Foundations of Christian Leadership Program at the Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, the pope has been clearest on his message of community, telling people, including "those who are undocumented: You are loved and valued."

She also points to his message to youths at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013 as something that still resonates with her. He told the crowd "not to be afraid, to take risks and to be courageous" stressing they should prepare for "courageous and prophetic action in solidarity with the earth and with the poor."

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