

LIVE GOSPEL VALUES, NOT THE WORLD'S

A REFLECTION ON H.H. FRANCIS' WORDS TO CONGRESS DURING APOSTOLIC VISIT TO THE US

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Our Holy Father Pope Francis has been consistently reminding us that we need to always be open to 'God's surprises' - and beautifully I was given the opportunity to put his words into action. The invitation that I received on September 15 from our Congressman Darin LaHood to be present with him in the Holy Father's address to the Joint Session of Congress certainly was one of my life's most unexpected and joyful surprises. It was a unexpected gift, filled with many small details of the Lord's love for me personally, and also for my religious community. For our charism is to be a living image and presence of the Heart of Mary in the heart of the Church and in the heart of the world - and what an opportunity for Our Lady to be present in the heart of the world through one of her poor Servants. Ultimately, I believe that this is the deepest reason that the Lord miraculously brought this moment about: just like Our Lady was always present in a hidden way during the ministry of her Son, so too Our Lady desired to be present, through one of her daughters, during the ministry of her Son's earthly representative, Pope Francis.



Many people have asked about what it was like to be present for such a historic moment for our nation. It is hard to find the right words. It was a profoundly special moment - all the leaders of our nation gathered to hear the voice of our 'Papa'. The atmosphere in Congress was joyful and everyone was moved to have him present in our midst. It unified all present in the pursuit of a good - the good of being the men and women God has called us to be. Our Holy Father said so much, and all his words should be pondered and prayed over. But there are three highlights I would choose to ruminate on with you for a moment.

First, our Holy Father preached the Gospel. It is a common temptation to 'politicize' the words of our Holy Father and make them fit into categories we have created: Democrat, Republican, left, right, liberal, conservative. The pope is none of these: he is a Catholic who brings the teaching of Christ. Many want to base their reflections on his address based on these categories, but this would lose the very essence and core of what He desires to communicate: the Gospel, which is a challenge to all of us. The Gospel challenges all of us to go beyond selfishness and self-referentialism, and impels us to make our lives a gift. He asked all of us, through our nation's leaders, to live Gospel values, not the world's, and this is a challenge for each person, regardless of their political leanings.

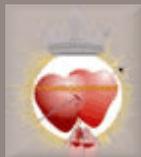
Second, he reminded us of the profound dignity of the human person. In the very beginning, he explained the mission of a political leader: "to protect, by means of the law, the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face." He reminded them and us that the very basis of our dignity is that image and likeness. And for that reason, we are called to really see each person as a person, as a child of God. So often, we forget about this because we are in pursuit of money, fame, attention, our own agendas, power and so much more. We cast aside people, forgetting they are really the only thing that matters. The love by which we love the Lord and others is the only thing we will 'take with us' to heaven. Our Holy Father reminded us that our identity and mission is precisely this love of one another. Therefore, when we are evaluating politics, laws and decisions, we must truly see our neighbors as our brothers and sisters, our family. Only by seeing them as such will we know how to make just and moral legislation.

Last, we saw that our Holy Father touched the heart of our nation by his presence, his words, his gestures. Just what touches the hearts of so many people from all faiths, backgrounds and places? It is the presence of Christ who is love. He carries Christ with him. He is a faithful vessel of his presence. Therefore, his words are not empty rhetoric, but they are the lived reality of his life. He has allowed Christ into his own heart to purify, refine and dwell there. And Christ does dwell there. Therefore, when we see him, we see Jesus. And it is only Jesus who can reach in the depths of our hearts and souls and do miraculous work there.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Congressman Darin LaHood for giving me this unique and unforgettable opportunity, and through me, to my community. I am grateful for his desire to so generously share this unmerited gift, and I am grateful for the friendship I have gained in the process. He, his family, and the ministry entrusted into his care will continue to remain in my prayers always.

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