Fact Sheet: Popes Visiting New York

It took 20 centuries for a pope to visit New York City. Pope Francis becomes the fourth Pontiff to visit the Big Apple. “It's hard to talk about the relative importance of different papal visits, since each has happened in its own unique set of circumstances,” explains J. Patrick Hornbeck II, Associate Professor and Chair of the Theology Department at Fordham University. “However, Pope Francis has certainly attracted much more attention from Catholics and non-Catholics around the world than his predecessors, and so there is an added level of excitement around this visit. He comes to a country that is in many ways more divided -- politically, racially, religiously -- than in the past, so his words about peace and justice within and among societies will be particularly timely.”

Although many believe the pontiff’s presence and impact around the globe is beneficial, some (including those in the United States) have differing opinions. “What some people consider progress others consider regress, and some of the ideas that popes have emphasized on previous visits, for instance Catholic teachings on abortion, are among the most divisive in U.S. society,” says Hornbeck. “However, Pope Francis has throughout his papacy emphasized the need for societies to take care of the poor, outcast, and marginalized -- and my hope is that on this visit, people will hear those themes from him and reflect on how they can apply them to their own lives.”

These are the Pope who have visited New York previously:

Pope Paul VI

- Arrived at JFK airport in October of 1965
- 1st pope to leave the Italian border since Napoleonic times (1809).
- Became first pope to set foot in the New World.
- Upon arrival, said “Greetings to you, America. The first pope to set foot on your land blesses you with all his heart. He renews, as it were, the gesture of your discoverer, Christopher Columbus, when he planted the Cross of Christ on this blessed soil.”
18,000 police officers stood guard during the 25 mile trek through the city
Trip was 1 day to U.S. (14 hours)
During trip, met President Lyndon B. Johnson, addressed United Nations, held mass at St. Patrick’s I and Yankee Stadium, and went to the World’s Fair.

Pope St. John Paul II Visit One
- Arrived at La Guardia Airport after visiting Boston October of 1979
- Came to the United States only one year after becoming pope
- During trip:
  • Went to the United Nations, where he met the Secretary-General and then addressed the General Assembly.
  • Visited St. Patrick’s Cathedral and celebrated mass with more than 3,000 priests and nuns who attended the service.
  • Went to Yankee Stadium, where he addressed 80,000 New Yorkers and asked them to treat the poor kindly, as their “brothers and sisters.”
  • Celebrated at Madison Square Garden with 19,000 teenagers.
  • Ended with a mass at Shea Stadium, attended by 52,000 people. Told the crowd, “A city needs a soul if it is to become a true home for human beings.”

Pope St. John Paul II Visit Two
- Arrived October 4, 1995 at Newark International Airport from Rome.
- During trip:
  • Went to the UN to celebrate its 50th anniversary and addressed the General Assembly.
  • Visited New Jersey to hold mass at Giants Stadium.
  • Visited the Aqueduct Racetrack in the borough of Queens. Met by a crowd of 100,000 people and gave a homily.
  • Ended visit in Central Park, where he held mass.

Pope Benedict XVI
- Arrived April 18th, 2000.
- During trip:
  • Addressed the UN; praised the diplomats as defenders of human rights.
  • Visited a Jewish synagogue. First pope to visit a Jewish place of worship in America.
  • Held mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.
  • Visited disabled children and led a youth rally of over 20,000 teens at St. Joseph’s seminary in Yonkers.
• Visited Ground Zero, where he prayed for lost victims in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Prayed for “eternal light and peace” for those fallen and their families
• Held mass at Yankee Stadium for a crowd of 60,000. More than 200,000 people had requested tickets for the free event. This marked the third time a pope visited the stadium—a record for any venue in the United States.

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