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TIME CODE/LOG

0:00-0:05  It is projected to cost the city of NY $1.5 million per day that the Pope is in the city. Some agnostics and atheists have objected to gifts from the City like the 80,000 tickets to see Pope Francis in Central Park. Annie Laurie Gaylor recently wrote a letter to the NYC mayor saying that the city of NY seems to be showing favoritism to catholicism, over all minority religions and non-religions. Do you feel like this is true? Is the city endorsing Pope Francis’ sectarian message? How do we as Americans, Catholic or not, recognize this?

0:30
So there’s a long history in the United States welcoming religious leaders from all different parts of the spectrum. When the Dalai Lama comes to New York he speaks in large venues--he gets the same secret service protection the Pope is going to use. When heads of state come here for the United Nations, we don’t give them protection if we agree with their message and deny them protection if we don’t agree with them. So this is an example of what’s going to happen with Pope Francis next week. He’s an example of the openness America has to people of all religions, all different countries. And yes with someone who is as popular and well known as Pope Francis, there are thousands of people who will want to come see him. And so of course, that does involve a cost. But I don’t think that New York is being any more bias toward the Pope then they would be toward any other religious leader.

In a country--especially in the city of NY-- with such an immense wealth inequality, how does Pope Francis message and his Jesuit background contradict with the American way of life?

1:07 That's a great question. One of the things Pope Francis has emphasized throughout his time as pope is what dangers there are in the global economic system that prioritizes the few at the expense of the many. And that’s something we spend a lot of time talking about here at Fordham
as well, whether in our economic classes or our sociology classes, even our theology and philosophy classes. So there’s a tension between the excesses of what he would call global capitalism and what he takes to be the essence of the message of the Church—which is to say that God loves all people. And that the dignity of all people is to be sustained. With the number of folks in this country, I think there’s going to be some heavy lifting on the part of the Pope. They may not immediately resonate with the message that he sends. But it’s a message that’s not unique to Catholicism. I think it’s fair to say that religious leaders from all different aspects of the spectrum have many of the same critiques that the Pope has articulated. He happens to have one of the largest global pulpits to make the case about economic injustice. I think we’re going to see him make exactly that case when he’s here in the United States.

Pope Francis recently allowed priests, rather than Senior church figures, the ability to forgive women who have had abortions. How does this differ from other Popes’ stances in the past? Is this in line with the Church’s teachings or Jesus’ teachings or both?

2:49 That’s a good question as well. I think there have been some misunderstandings on what Pope Francis said a couple weeks ago in regard to women who have had abortions. It has always been the case that a priest could forgive women in confession near the time of her death if she had had an abortion. And some bishops had already given that power to their priests. So we didn’t see a major change. We saw a symbolically important change. The Pope said that when women are in these circumstances they should not have to go through an additional level of bureaucracy in order to access the forgiveness of the Church. So I think one of the things that we’re seeing here is the Pope being consistent on a message that he’s emphasized since he was elected. Which is one of the most important things Christians believe about God is that God is a God of mercy. And that God wouldn’t want to put too many barriers in the way of people experiencing the mercy of God. I think it’s very consistent with the Pope’s agenda, with the Church’s message. Jesus never specifically spoke about abortions. I don’t think it’s fair to say that this would or wouldn’t be inline with Jesus. Jesus did talk a lot though about forgiveness.
From uttering the words “who am I to judge?” to meeting with several transgender folks in Europe to suggesting openness to the ideas of the Church endorsing civil unions, the Pope has seemed very accepting of the LGBT community. How does this differ from his predecessors? How is the Pope setting the standard for the rest of the Church to act? What tangible reforms, if any, could be possible in the global religious climate today under Pope Francis’ leadership?

4:10 That’s a great question. Certainly many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender Catholics have found a lot of solace and sorts of things with all Pope Francis has had to say. His line, ‘who am I to judge?’ has led many people to believe that he does support same sex marriage or at least civil unions for same-sex people. 49% of Americans in a recent poll said that the Pope was in favor of gay rights. So it may come as a surprise to many people that as sympathetic as Pope Francis has been, that’s not actually his position. Pope Francis says the Church should engage LGBT people with mercy and with compassion. He says that the Church should not put barriers in their way. But he hasn’t gone so far as to endorse civil unions or same sex marriages. So I think one of the things that’s going to be complicated about the Papal visit is that people have expectations of the Pope whether on the progressive side, like in this case or the conservative side that he may not be able to fulfill. This is a Pope who does not neatly line up with either side of the political spectrum.

The Pope’s canonization of Junipero Serra is both a victory for the Hispanic-American community and a frustration for the Native Americans who charge that Serra was part of the Spanish colonial system that savagely exploited native peoples and brought diseases that decimated their populations. Does canonizing Serra set precedent for overlooking evils of the American conquest? How does Pope Francis reconcile the two communities? What is the overall process of canonization?

5:50 Certainly both sides of the debate about Junipero Serra have important principles. For those who are supporting him as a saint, he was one of the great missionaries who brought catholicism to the american west— who at the time, brought services they might not have otherwise had. Native American communities, as well have an important principle. Which is
to say that that record of colonialism was not without tremendous blemishes. Serra himself said that it would be legitimate to use physical force against the Native people if they were misbehaving. So he has a difficult circle to square. That it's not possible to support both those on one side and those who are on the other side. So how exactly he proceeds with the canonization is going to be about great sensitivity. Will he address the darker side. Will he acknowledge Serra, like every human being who has probably live with the exception of Jesus, that Serra also was a sinner. That like all of us, he was imperfect. That like all of us, he was a creature and a creation of his own time. I think that if the Pope sends a note like that this canonization may be more welcomed by some Native Americans. The actual canonization process itself takes many many years and in some cases it takes decades or even centuries. So what we are going to be seeing in Washington next week is the final act of a process that began a long time ago.

Take a moment. Then say anything that you came prepared here to say that we didn’t touch upon--any expansions of the answers to the questions.

7:40 It’s interesting to me that Americans and New Yorkers in particular are so excited about this Papal visit. Pope Francis has been certainly the most popular Pope since records have ever been kept. There have been parts of this message that have appealed to people who are on all different sides of the American Political spectrum. And I think the main thing we have to remember about the Pope, is that he’s not coming as a conservative, or republican, or as a liberal or as a democrat. But rather he’s bringing his take on the message of Christ. That the Catholic church and the Christian churches have attempted to bring forward for centuries. So that’s going to make everyone I think a little uncomfortable. I think conservatives may not be happy when he talks about income inequality. Liberals may not be happy when he talks about issues like abortion or same sex marriage. So for everyone, there’s going to be a process of receiving Pope Francis on his own terms--rather than on the terms that we may want to put on him and that’s going to be challenging for people in the US.

8:50 to end B-Roll