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U.S. President Joe Biden, accompanied by his wife, Jill, is pictured with Pope Francis during a meeting Oct. 29 at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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"It came up — we just talked about the fact he was happy that I was a good Catholic and I should keep receiving Communion," President Joe Biden said after meeting with Pope Francis.

There he goes again. Biden surely knows that it is considered bad form, *brutta figura* as the Romans say, to disclose what you discussed with the pope, especially if it is of a private nature. But he is a practicing Catholic who just met with the pope for more than 75 minutes! He could surely imagine his parents, the nuns who taught him as a boy, his childhood clergy, all looking down from heaven and beaming. Of course he was going to blurt it out, even if it broke diplomatic protocol.

Besides, this is Joe Biden we are talking about. He did not need to whisper into President Barack Obama's ear that signing the Affordable Care Act was "a big f---ing deal," but he did. He should not have gotten out in front of Obama on the issue of supporting gay marriage, but he did. If you think that the most important quality in a politician is message discipline, Biden was never the person for you!

The comment was more than impetuous though; it was impolitic. By sharing with the world what the pope had said privately, Biden did not exactly help those U.S. bishops who are trying to help him. Their argument against those clamoring for the bishops' conference to issue a document insisting Biden and other pro-choice politicians be denied Communion has been that the conference has never supported taking such a position, that only a person's pastor could impose such a terrible penalty. While Francis enjoys universal jurisdiction, he is not exactly Biden's pastor.

This leads to the most obvious fact about the whole brouhaha: What an outlier the U.S. church is. Who could doubt that Francis would tell Biden to continue receiving Communion. No where else in the world do bishops think as some U.S. bishops do that politicians should be penalized for their positions on public policy issues by denying them access to the Eucharist. Only here do some bishops have more confidence in their power to penalize than they do in the grace of the sacraments to

convert the human heart. Only here do bishops act as if they were the board of an anti-abortion NGO and not as pastors of the Church of Jesus Christ. Francis is not from the U.S.

By revealing what the pope said to him, Biden poked the right-wing culture warrior bear, but they did not need much to provoke them. The pictures of Biden and Francis laughing and smiling was enough to set them off. Still, by sharing the pope's comment, Biden made sure that even more heads exploded than I had anticipated. Field hospital indeed!

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