News



Bishop Robert Gruss of Saginaw, Michigan, at the Vatican in 2019 (CNS/Vatican Media)



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A Catholic bishop in Michigan has apologized for disparaging President Joseph Biden as a "stupid" Catholic "who is not living the life Jesus wants for him" during a recent talk on Christian forgiveness following a celebration of daily Mass.

Claiming that his comments during his April 5 presentation were "taken out of context," Bishop Robert Gruss of Saginaw said his message focused on not harboring resentment toward Biden or other government officials, because doing so would be sinful.

"We must forgive them if we are to be free," Gruss said in a prepared statement provided by a diocesan spokesman.

The diocese emailed the statement late in the afternoon on April 19, a day after NCR reported on the bishop's remarks. The diocese did not provide a statement when NCR requested comment for the original story.

Following his explanation, and a comment where he urged people to find his presentation online to "understand what was really said," the bishop offered an apology.

"I used the word 'stupid' in reference to President Biden, recognizing that it was poor judgment in my choice of words," Gruss said. "It was not meant to be disparaging, and I apologize."

During his April 5 presentation, titled "Forgiveness as the Heart of Christianity," Gruss told the attendees at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption that he had no personal animus toward Biden, a fellow Catholic.

"I don't have any anger toward the president. I feel sorry for him. I'm not angry at him; he's just stupid," Gruss said.

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During his presentation, which was posted on the Saginaw Diocese's YouTube account, Gruss suggested that Biden, a Democrat whose support for abortion rights has rankled several bishops over the years, "doesn't understand the Catholic faith."

The bishop also said that Biden demonstrates ignorance "in the sense of not knowing."

"It's not stupidity in a derogatory way. It's stupidity in the sense of he doesn't know until he does things," said Gruss, whose comments elicited laughter from some audience members.

"So I'm not angry at him. I feel sorry for him, that's different," Gruss said.

Gruss' comments on the president's intellect and personal faith reflected the pointed criticisms that some U.S. Catholic prelates have repeatedly made against Biden since his election in November 2020. Several outspoken conservative bishops wanted the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2021 to declare that Catholic politicians like Biden should not receive Communion if they support abortion rights.

On social media, Gruss' remarks prompted some priests, conservative Catholic commentators and others to come to his defense while other Catholics criticized the bishop for showing "such open partisanship."

Named the bishop of Saginaw by Pope Francis in May 2019, Gruss struck a conciliatory tone in his prepared statement, which the diocese also posted April 20 on its website: "I will continue to pray for the president and all political leaders, that they may seek and be guided by the Spirit of Truth. I encourage people of all faiths and goodwill to pray for our great nation."

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