Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Francis greets a Muslim family from Djibouti, Africa, at the nunciature in Brussels Sept. 28. On the final day of his trip to Luxembourg and Belgium on Sept. 29, the pope will celebrate Mass for an expected 35,000 people, marking the first papal Mass in Brussels in nearly 30 years. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Brussels — September 28, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis on Sept. 28 slammed the "arrogant indifference" of powerful leaders who put financial interests over efforts to save the planet and said a conversion of the human heart is necessary to combat climate change.

"As long as markets are given pride of place, then our common home will continue to suffer injustice," Francis said during an exchange with students at the Université Catholique de Louvain.

"Ecological issues have become increasingly urgent because of the arrogant indifference rooted in the hearts of the powerful, who so often give preference to economic interests, according to which financial markets are the sole arbiters determining whether an appeal is to be taken up or silenced," the pope during his second full day of his Sept. 27-29 visit to Belgium.

The pope's remarks came in response to a letter written by university professors and researchers who have been meeting regularly to study Francis' 2015 landmark environment encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, ahead of the pope's visit here to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the university's founding.

> 'The beauty of the gift of creation summons us to a great responsibility, for we are guests, not despots.'
> —Pope Francis
>
> Tweet this

During his speech, the pope said that the heart of the Catholic Church's "ecological program" is the idea that people must steward the earth for future generations

"The beauty of the gift of creation summons us to a great responsibility, for we are guests, not despots," said Francis, whose namesake is the 13th-century saint known for his care for creation.

Francis' visit to Belgium got off to a bumpy start on Sept. 27 when both the country's king and prime minister delivered blistering criticism of the church's handling of clergy abuse cases and the rector of the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) challenged the pope on issues related to women and LGBTQ people. His second day here has primarily been dedicated to spotlighting the church's social teaching — particularly its commitment to migrants, fighting climate change and serving the poor.



Pope Francis has breakfast with migrants and people who are unhoused in the Church of St. Gilles in Brussels Sept. 28. During his second of three days in Belgium, he has spotlighted the church's commitment to migrants, fighting climate change and serving the poor. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

And the pope himself led by example, beginning the day with a surprise visit to a local parish in the Belgian capital that offers free breakfast for migrants and homeless people. He also met privately with two refugee families — one Christian family from Syria and a Muslim family from Djibouti, Africa.

During his morning visit to the parish of St. Gilles, the pope sat at a table and shared croissants and coffee with 10 people before heading to the city's National Basilica of the Sacred Heart to meet with the country's Catholic leaders.

In a country that was once entirely Catholic, but has witnessed rapid secularization — due to both shifting demographics and fallout from clergy abuse scandals — the pope said that the only way to evangelize was to offer an authentic witness to the faith, especially to those most in need.

"This present crisis, like every crisis, is a time given in order to shock us, to make us question and to change," he said.

Priests, he said at the basilica, should not focus solely on "just preserving or managing a past legacy," but instead should be "pastors who are in love with Jesus Christ and who are attentive to responding to the often implicit demands of the Gospel as they walk with God’s holy people."



Some 2,600 people gather in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart for a meeting with Pope Francis in Brussels Sept. 28. The meeting included bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians and pastoral workers. Francis was to later meet privately with Jesuits. On Sept. 29, he will celebrate Mass for an expected crowd of more than 35,000. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

The pope's words — and visit — come as the church here has been forced to both reckon with its past but also rethink its future. While Mass attendance has plummeted, more than half the country's hospitals are Catholic run, as are many of the country's schools and social service agencies.

As they contemplated how to move forward in the modern world, the pope repeated one of his favorite rejoinders that "there is room for everyone in the church," and left them with a charge to to be a church that "offers everyone an opening to the infinite, and that knows how to look beyond."

"This is the church that evangelizes, that lives the joy of the Gospel and practices mercy," he said.

Later on Sept. 28, the pope was expected to meet privately with Jesuits. On Sept. 29, prior to turning to Rome, he will celebrate Mass for an expected crowd of more than 35,000, marking the first papal Mass here in nearly 30 years.

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Francis in Luxembourg and Belgium** feature series. View the full series.