



Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, speaks during a news conference at the Vatican, on Jan. 18, 2024. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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The first U.S.-born pope is very much looking forward to eventually visiting his native country even as he prepares to head to Latin America — his seventh papal trip abroad after his election a year and a half ago, the Vatican foreign minister said.

"Obviously a visit to the United States is very likely, I would say, in the not-too-distant future," said Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's secretary for relations with states and international organizations, at the foreign press club in Rome Oct. 27.

"Whether it'll be '27 or later, I really don't know," he said, since "one of the things that will influence it is eventually the American elections."

Once the midterm elections are over this fall, then the window of opportunity might open in 2027, he said, adding that too late in the year will start being "the vigil of the presidential election, so that may affect an eventual decision on the date."

"But yes, there's no doubt about it, the pope wants to go to the States; he very much is looking forward to that," the British diplomat said during an hour-long conversation with reporters.

Leo heads to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru Nov. 6-17, less than four weeks after he had lung cancer surgery that removed his lower right lobe. Doctors have said the pope's recovery has been progressing well, no more cancer was detected and no further treatment was required.

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Asked why the pope did not put off the trip, which will include multiple long flights and high altitudes, Gallagher said, "He's going on this trip very simply because he wants to go."

"He was looking forward to it," and given the positive clinical reports, "he feels he can go," he said.

The archbishop said he, like the general public, was surprised when the pope announced in early October that doctors had found a nodule that then turned out to be cancerous.

When then 69-year-old Cardinal Robert Prevost was elected pontiff in 2025, he hit the ground running, the archbishop said. "I think there was a temptation to think, here we have Superman, the Super-Pope."

"The fact that he has fallen ill, with, in many ways, one of the most common illnesses of our age, means that he is a poor mortal like the rest of us, and I think that that is going to change how we see him and possibly how he sees himself as well," Gallagher said, calling it "a bit of a game-changer" for this pontificate.

"But I don't think it is going to be necessarily bringing things forward or accelerating things very much, at least not in the immediate future," he said. "I think he will stick to his plan, and he will stick to revealing his plan" slowly, as he has done so far.

The journalist leading the conversation with the archbishop asked how the Roman Curia sees the U.S.-born pope and whether he is seen as "a no-nonsense American caped crusader with a math degree," who is going to "fix all of the Vatican's financial problems," or whether he is too unfamiliar with the workings of Rome and the "curia will eventually eat him alive."

Gallagher said, "I think he is business-like in that way" and that "I've heard a number of people who are on the economic side of the Vatican's finances saying it's good to have a pope who can read a spreadsheet."

"He is, in many ways, easier to work with at the human level," he said, and the pope being an "English speaker makes some things easier."

"I think Pope Leo really wants to get to grips with things," and often asks follow-up questions, he said. "So, I don't think the curia will eat him up. I think if there's any indication of that, he will demonstrate that he too has an appetite."

The Vatican foreign minister, who works closely with the pope and the Vatican's Secretariat of State to keep the pope informed about global, regional and local events and then helps carry out the pope's agenda, said he finds Leo to be

"extremely well informed."

Every week, the archbishop meets with the pope to "go through my papers and mention things (and) nearly everything I say he knows already, which possibly is something I should examine my conscience about."

"He obviously informs himself very well" during his very busy schedule, he said, and "I think he has a little bit of a natural touch for politics."

One trait that distinguishes Leo from his predecessors, said the archbishop, who has served under four popes since he joined the Vatican diplomatic service in 1984, "is that he always has this great serenity."

"Even when he's looking at the world scene, even when there are tensions or there are negative reactions to something that he has said or to what the Holy See has done, he's really unfazed by all of that," he said. "He's only preaching the Gospel. He's doing what he believes he has to do, in the way he believes he has to do, and he will go on in that way."