

Pope Francis in Cuba: 'We do not serve ideas, we serve people'

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Pope Francis spoke out on the need to serve and the evils of pride to thousands of Cubans who attended Sunday's morning mass in Havana.

Speaking at the Revolutionary Square on the backdrop of massive portraits of revolutionary leaders Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, as well as a giant poster of Jesus, the pope warned of the dangers of power and ideology when others are excluded, Reuters reports.

"Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people," the pope said in his sermon. "Do not neglect them [others] for plans which can be seductive, but are unconcerned about the face of the person beside you."

Pope Francis added: "All of us are called by virtue of our Christian vocation to that service which truly serves, and to help one another not to be tempted by a 'service' which is really 'self-serving.'"

Pope Francis's message could be taken as an address to power, since the revolutionary square is as much the center of government as of revolution, the Guardian notes.

After Sunday's mass in Havana, Pope Francis privately met with former Cuban President Fidel Castro and exchanged gifts, the Associated Press reported. The meeting lasted for around 30-40 minutes.

Papal spokesman Federico Lombardi said during the conversation, Fidel wanted to reflect on big issues and questions facing the world and humanity. Francis' recent encyclical on the environment and the global economic system was discussed. Lombardi said that the 2012 visit of Benedict XVI, when Fidel peppered him with questions, the meeting with Francis was more of a conversation. Lombardi said that out of respect for the family and the informality of the encounter, no photographs

would be released. He said that the decision to not release any images had been taken during the discussions with Cuban authorities to set up the meeting.

The Roman Catholic church has maintained a steady relationship with Cuba since the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro that established communist rule in Cuba, according to the BBC.

Pope Francis is credited with brokering last December's diplomatic deal after the decades-old enmity between Cuba and the US.

Prior to the pope's visit, Cuba released more than 3,500 prisoners—the largest official pardon since 1959. This was the third time Cuba has granted inmates freedom before a papal visit. In 1998, Cuba freed about 300 prisoners, including 101 political prisoners, ahead of Pope John Paul's visit. In 2012, ahead of a visit by Pope Benedict XVI, Cuba released 2,900 prisoners.

The most notable recent release occurred in January, when Havana pardoned 53 political prisoners as part of the breakthrough December 17 US-Cuba agreement and included many known to international human rights groups as "prisoners of conscience," Reuters reported.