

Pope has told the USA Congress...

Pope urges 'humane' US migrant response



Pope Francis has told the US Congress that the US must see migrants not as "numbers", rather "as persons".

Speaking to a rare joint session, the Pope said immigrants should be treated "with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated".

In the same address, the pontiff renewed his call for ending the death penalty, and for better treatment of the poor and disadvantaged.

He was warmly greeted by 500 lawmakers, justices and officials.

Before his address, the Pope was greeted at the US Capitol by Speaker of the House John Boehner, who is Catholic, and then entered the chamber to thunderous applause.

He said the world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since World War Two, and noted the immense challenges that the crisis presents.

But he drew particular attention to the movement of migrants from Central America to the United

States in search of a better life - a reference which drew a standing ovation.



The Pope speaks at the podium Image copyright AFP

"We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation," he said.

Also in the speech:

- he related the work of lawmakers to that of Moses, saying they had a responsibility to promote unity through "just legislation"
- the world must be attentive to "fundamentalism, whether religious or of any other kind"
- touched on economic inequality saying "even in the developed world, the effects of unjust structure and actions are all too apparent"
- renewed calls for "the global abolition of the death penalty" saying criminals should be rehabilitated
- he reaffirmed his "esteem and appreciation" to the indigenous people of the Americas who faced "turbulent and violent" contacts with colonising powers
- the "very basis of marriage and the family" is being called into question
- Mr Boehner, sat behind the pontiff, appeared to be moved to tears during the speech.
- In the speech, the pontiff highlighted the work of several famous Americans including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, and said even amid conflict they provide inspiration.

- After finishing with the words "God bless America", the Pope received a prolonged standing ovation.
- The 78-year-old Argentine pontiff then appeared on a balcony at the Capitol and spoke to thousands gathered on the West Lawn.



The House Chamber as seen from behind Pope Francis Image copyright Reuters

Over 500 lawmakers and senior members of government were in attendance

Catholics in America:

80 million baptised as Catholics

Six of the nine Supreme Court justices are Catholic

31% of the US Congress (22% general population)

One Catholic president (JFK) and one vice-president (Joe Biden)

Six Catholic Republicans running for president, the most ever

Later on Thursday the Pope is due to share a meal with homeless people.

The Pope is on his first official visit to the US and has sought to bring Catholics back to the Church with a more inclusive message. He has drawn massive crowds.

The pontiff arrived in the US on Tuesday, following his first visit to Cuba.

BBC Reporters