

In Rome and at the Vatican, Biden receives warm welcome

by [Claire Giangravé](#) in the [December 1, 2021](#) issue



President Joe Biden, left, exchanges gifts with Pope Francis as they meet at the Vatican on October 29. (Photo by Vatican Media)

In Rome and at the Vatican, President Joe Biden found a safe haven from the debates taking place back home, where some US bishops argue Catholic politicians should not be allowed to receive communion if they support abortion rights.

Biden was in Rome from October 29 to November 1 to attend the G20 summit, convening leaders from the world's strongest economic powers. On the first day of his trip, the president had a 90-minute private audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican, the longest meeting on record between a pope and a head of state. Biden told reporters that during the meeting, the pope said Biden was "a good Catholic" and should continue receiving communion.

Biden attended mass twice during his stay in Rome, once at St. Patrick's Church and another at the private residence of the US ambassador to Italy, in an atmosphere described by those present as "welcoming" and "prayerful."

The warm and friendly meeting at the Vatican was in stark contrast with the heated debates taking place among US bishops who have raised the question of whether Catholic politicians who favor abortion rights should be allowed to receive the Eucharist.

Biden's second mass in Rome took place on All Saints' Day. Swapping the grandeur of St. Patrick's for a more improvised setting—where a coffee table served as altar—the president took part in the Eucharist surrounded by Catholic members of his cabinet.

"It was an honor and a privilege to celebrate liturgy with the president and a few members of his team on a feast day when we celebrate men and women who aren't perfect but became holy through their humanity made whole by God's grace, and overcame their own shortcomings and tragedies to be of service to other people," said the celebrant, Jesuit priest David McCallum, in an interview.

"It was . . . not a political stunt," McCallum said, adding that he was moved by the humility and prayerfulness of the little gathering. "No matter who was attending or their role, each person was there because they wanted to pray and participate actively in the Eucharist," he said.

The president gifted McCallum with a presidential challenge coin similar to the one he gave to Pope Francis during their meeting at the Vatican. "He's such an avid friend of the Jesuits," McCallum said, adding that twice after the mass Biden said: "God bless the Jesuits!" —Religion News Service