

Pool Report: Celebration of the Eucharist for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, Madison Square Garden
September 25, 2015

Pilgrims began approaching Madison Square Garden (MSG) in Manhattan, New York City, at around 1:00 p.m. for Mass later that evening with Pope Francis. They were welcomed to MSG by heavy security and bag-sniffing dogs before entering.

The temperature outside was warm and was approximately 80 degrees and sunny.

Upon entering MSG, pilgrims found available for purchase papal memorabilia, along with food and beverages. Among the items available were rosaries with an inscription on the back that read "Francis Our Pope: A Journey of Faith through the Heart of New York 2015." T-shirts, Christmas tree ornaments, and medallions featuring the likeness of Pope Francis were also available.

At 3:30 p.m. the large screens in MSG began to play a promotion of the "Inner-city Scholarship Fund," which funds Catholic education for low-income families in New York City. The video featured Former New York City Police Department Commissioner Raymond Kelly who spoke about how "an investment in the fund is an investment in the future of the city." The video also carried a message spoken by Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York that said: "New York City doesn't work if the Catholic schools don't work."

A loudspeaker intermittently announced to the crowd that priests were available to hear confessions. Dozens of priests on the sixth floor sat in folding chairs while Catholics stood in line seeking forgiveness for their sins.

Peter Tesoriero of Staten Island shared his feelings about going to confession in MSG next to concession stands: "It feels a little uncomfortable with people walking by, but it didn't really bother me. It's a little unique. And I feel very special being here that the Pope is going to be here. It's something that's probably going to happen only once in my lifetime. It's very special occasion and I really love this Pope and that's why I'm here. I think Pope Francis is moving the church in the right direction. He's preaching love, humanity; a very humble man. I've never felt so strongly about a Pope before. He's actually doing the walk, and not just doing the talk. He's there for the little guy, the poor. He reminds me of Jesus Christ. He really does."

A pre-Mass entertainment program titled "Francis, Our Pope: A Journey of Faith," emceed by actor Martin Sheen, began at 4:00 p.m. He introduced Bishop William Murphy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, who excitedly praised Pope Francis and the hope he will bring to the city. Mr. Sheen continued to introduce several performing artists, including Gloria Estefan, who sang to those in attendance. Ms. Estefan wore a full length back dress with a black lace top.

At 5:00 p.m., introduced by Emilio and Gloria Estefan, Jennifer Hudson performed "Alleluia" for a growing crowd. Songwriter, actor and musician Harry Connick Jr., joined by the Broadway Inspirational Voices Choir, later performed "How Great Thou Art."

At 5:48 p.m., Pope Francis entered the floor of the venue via a papal golf cart to a capacity crowd of about 20,000 people with Cardinal Dolan sitting in the backseat. The papal golf cart circled the floor level, drove past the altar and made its way back through the center aisle. While security detail attempted to keep pilgrims from getting too close, the papal car stopped in the center aisle and a baby was presented to the Holy Father to be kissed.

At 6:06 p.m. the procession began. The choir sang "All Creatures of God and Our King." Most bishops were dressed in white while the New York bishops wore green vestments. Pope Francis was also vested in green; his crozier and miter differentiated the pontiff from his brother bishops.

At 6:10 p.m., Pope Francis kissed the altar. He slowly walked over to a statute of Our Lady of Guadalupe and prayed solemnly. The Mass began at 6:12 p.m.

The first reading from Isaiah was proclaimed in Spanish by actor, comedian, and current CBS Sunday Morning reporter Moe Rocca. Following the Responsorial Psalm (there was no second reading) Pope Francis, over the singing of Alleluia, blessed the deacon who was to proclaim the gospel. The deacon used incense at the ambo and chanted in English from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. This is the gospel reading that is open in the Bible fused to the rock at Ground Zero.

Pope Francis walked to the ambo to deliver his homily. Within his message Pope Francis made a simple reference to the figurative smog of city life, to which the crowd laughed lightly. The Holy Father smiled. The focus of the message was that the people have seen a great light, emerging through the smog, with its presence here in the city. The Holy Father then walked back to the cathedra, bowed his head, and prayed.

The Universal Prayers were then recited in Gaelic, Mandarin, English, French and Italian. The Holy Father's prayer was read in English.

Pope Francis incensed the altar as the gifts were brought forward. With three standing candles lit on each side of the altar, and a crucifix placed in the middle of the altar, Pope Francis began the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Bells rang aloud while the crowd stood in silence as the Holy Father raised the Eucharist and the Chalice. Cardinal Dolan and Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of the Brooklyn Diocese then joined the Holy Father to pray in Latin over the offering. The Our Father was sung in Latin. The exchange of peace was introduced by Pope Francis in English.

Some 400 priests offered the Holy Eucharist to those who presented themselves to receive.

After communion Cardinal Dolan joyfully addressed the pontiff in English: "At every Mass we pray for Francis our Pope. And now - here....you.... are!!" A thunderous standing ovation arose from the crowd along with chants of Viva El Papa! Pope Francis smiled from ear to ear.

Cardinal Dolan happily called out the names of United States saints to another thunderous applause. "The church is our family, and thanks Holy Father for visiting us, your family." Dolan then embraced Pope Francis to their mutual smiles. Cardinal Dolan presented the pope with a chalice.

With a wide smile, following the final blessing, Francis said: "And I ask you, please, don't forget to pray for me." Mass concluded at 7:30 p.m.

Pope Francis walked down the steps of the altar, shook hands with a woman in a wheelchair, and recessed while blessing the crowd. At 7:35 pm., Pope Francis exited the main floor of MSG.

####

Filed by: Dave Maluchnik