



Pope Francis is the anti-Trump

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As a Catholic, I've always loathed the way my religion made me feel guilty over just about everything. But in the case of undocumented immigrants, I say, bring it on, Pope Francis! We should all feel guilty for not helping the voiceless.

Look, we need to solve our immigration problem. But what I don't understand is the vitriol directed at Mexicans and South Americans. (Let's be honest -- Asian and European immigrants don't get the same level of attacks.)

And lest you think I'm a just a bleeding heart -- I'm not. I'm hopelessly addicted to facts, not vitriol laced with fiction.

But some people have a blurry idea of what differentiates facts from fiction. I'm not just talking about Donald-whose-favorite-book-is-the-Bible-Trump. Conservative firebrand Ann Coulter's new best-selling book is titled: "Adios, America: The Left's Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole." Word is, according to The Washington Post, Trump read Coulter's tome "cover-to-cover."

In a nutshell, the book asserts there is a vast left-wing conspiracy keeping the facts from us. Brown people vote for Democrats! Among Coulter's "startling revelations" are lines such as: "People who live in gated communities tell us fences don't work" and "Today's immigrants aren't coming here to breathe free, they're coming here to live for free."

On the chance that undocumented immigrants are trying to escape violence or poverty? "Our country isn't a battered women's shelter," Coulter says.

I would swear on everything holy that Pope Francis will not divert the popemobile to buy a copy of Coulter's book.

As the Rev. James J. Miracky, New York provincial assistant for higher education with the Jesuits, told me, "It's clear where Francis stands: A nation is judged by how it treats the most vulnerable in the community."

A few facts before I continue. Undocumented immigrants do not qualify for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid or most other public benefits. It's true that their children -- or as Trump would say, their anchor babies -- are eligible if they are born here. But they are not sinking the American economy -- not by a long shot.

Noncitizen immigrants and children are 25% less likely to be signed up for Medicaid and 37% less likely to receive food stamps than Americans. That's according to the Cato Institute, an organization far from liberal.

Francis will not use those numbers to prove his point; he'll do something craftier. After all, as some critics say, he's a master of symbolism. Francis will meet with the "most vulnerable among us" -- undocumented immigrants and day laborers -- at a school in East Harlem on Friday.

Among them is a family made up of a man named Francisco, his wife and their four children.

"I remember when I was a child my father he said he (the Pope) was like a god," Francisco told me. "So, to have opportunity -- I can't believe it."

Francisco slipped into the United States 14 years ago to escape abject poverty in Mexico.

"Donald Trump is not a real American," he told me. The Americans he knows are compassionate -- like Pope Francis. "Once I told my wife, if some day they deport me, wherever I go in Mexico, I will never say that Americans are bad because no. I had opportunity to meet real good people."

Those "good people" helped Francisco raise \$6,000 to buy a condemned house. It has no heat, but that's OK. He picks up every construction job that is offered, no matter how small. He pays taxes. He gets by.

Is he a criminal? He is in this country illegally. But is he, as Trump and others assert, responsible for much of America's violent crime? No.

According to Jason Riley, who wrote the book, "Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed," immigrants like Francisco are less likely than the native population to commit violent crimes or be incarcerated. Riley wrote an in-depth article for The Wall Street Journal citing numerous studies, all showing we have less to fear from undocumented immigrants than Americans.

Francisco is not complaining about being called a criminal, or someone who takes advantage of American taxpayers. "My father (back in Mexico) says that we are in a gold jail," he tells me. "But we believe that it's better."

Pope Francis, lay it on us. Shame our politicians into coming up with a realistic policy that is tough yet compassionate toward immigrants. Isn't that what America is all about?