On the morning of Thursday, September 24, 2015, Pope Francis addressed the Congress of the United States, speaking slowly in English. On the morning of Friday, September 25, he addressed a "high-level" meeting of the UN General Assembly, speaking rapidly in his native Spanish. Both speeches were full of valid points, but the two were very different from each other. Francis was not being inconsistent; he was being selective in the way he spoke to each audience.

We all shape what we say according to whom we are speaking. How did you discuss the disaster in Haiti or Nepal or the violence in Paris with members of your Meeting? With your spouse or close friend? With worried teenagers or with a 7-year-old in your life?

In talking to Congress, the Pope was gentle and encouraging. He spoke of the peaceful core of all religions and the danger of polarization. He talked movingly about immigrants and refugees, the importance of family, and being at the service of dialogue and peace rather than resorting to war.

His particularly compelling quotes about business, the earth, and the environment include these:

• "Business (can be done in) ....service to the common good....(which) also includes the earth."

• " ....the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."

• We are called "...to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity."
He spoke differently, and much more strongly, on these same subjects at the UN. His tone was forceful and admonishing. For example, he spoke of

• "...oppressive lending systems which, far from promoting progress subject people to mechanisms which generate greater poverty, exclusion and dependence."

• "...power badly exercised," stressing that "no human individual or group can consider itself absolute, permitted to bypass the dignity and the rights of other individuals or their social groupings."

• "....a true right of the environment does exist ...we human beings are part of the environment ... Any harm done to the environment ... is harm done to humanity."

He correctly put together the humanitarian and environmental wrongs that are being committed. "....a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged..."

I could go on quoting this powerful speech. Instead I urge you to read the entire text of Francis’ address to the UN General Assembly. If you can find the time, read his message to Congress too. Ask yourself why these two speeches, only one day apart, ring so differently. Which audience do you identify with? Which message speaks to you? And, of course, ask yourself how you might—and will—respond.

Read Pope Francis’ Speeches Online

Full text of Pope Francis’ address to the US Congress (6 1/2 pages):

Full text of Pope Francis’ address to the United Nations General Assembly (approximately 11 pages):