

Pope Francis to meet with Raúl Castro at Vatican before his first Cuba trip

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Cuban president Raúl Castro will be received by Pope Francis at the Vatican this weekend.

Pope Francis will meet with Cuban president Raúl Castro at the Vatican on Sunday, four months before the pontiff travels to the Caribbean island, Holy See spokesman Federico Lombardi has announced.

“Raúl Castro will be received in the morning for strictly private talks,” the spokesman said in a statement Tuesday.

The Vatican announced last month that the Argentinian pope would visit Cuba in September, becoming only the third pontiff to do so.

September’s visit will precede a papal trip to the US.

The first pope from South America played a key role in the secret negotiations between Washington and Havana that led to the surprising announcement last December that they would seek to restore diplomatic ties.

The Holy See has said the pope personally mediated between the two sides, and the Vatican hosted delegations from the two countries in October.

Francis’s predecessor Benedict XVI visited Cuba in 2012. The previous pope, John Paul II, was the first to make a visit, in 1998.