



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Catechesis. The Apostolic Journey to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

And today I will talk about the Apostolic Journey I made in Asia and Oceania: it is called an Apostolic Journey because it is not a tourist trip, it is a journey to bring the Word of the Lord, to make the Lord known, and also to get to know the souls of the peoples. And this is very good.

Paul VI, in 1970, was the first Pope to fly towards the rising sun, with long visits to the Philippines and Australia, but pausing also in various Asian countries and in the Samoan Islands. And that was a memorable journey, wasn't it? Because the first to leave the Vatican was Saint John XXIII, who went to Assisi by train; then, Saint Paul VI did that: a memorable journey! In this one too I tried to follow his example but, being a few years older than he was, I limited myself to four countries: Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore. I thank the Lord who allowed me to do as an elderly Pope what I would have liked to do as a young Jesuit, because I wanted to go there as a missionary!

A first reflection that comes naturally after this journey is that in thinking of the Church, we are still

too Eurocentric, or as they say, “western”. But in reality, *the Church is much bigger*, much bigger than Rome and Europe, much bigger! And also, if I may say so, much *more alive*, in those countries. I experienced this in an exciting way by meeting those communities, listening to the testimonies of priests, religious sisters, laypeople, and especially catechists – catechists are those who drive evangelization. Churches that do not proselytize, but grow “by attraction”, as Benedict XVI wisely said.

In *Indonesia*, about ten per cent of people are Christians, and three per cent Catholics – a minority. But what I encountered was a lively, dynamic Church, capable of living and transmitting the Gospel in a country which has a very noble culture, inclined to harmonize diversity, and at the same time has the largest Muslim presence in the world. In that context, I received confirmation that *compassion* is the path that Christians can and must walk to bear witness to Christ the Saviour, and at the same time to encounter the great religious and cultural traditions. On the subject of compassion, let us not forget the three characteristics of the Lord: closeness, mercy and compassion. God is close, God is merciful and God is compassionate. If a Christian does not have compassion, he is of no use. “Faith, fraternity, compassion” was the motto of the visit to Indonesia: on the basis of these words, the Gospel enters every day into the life of the people in a concrete way, welcoming it and giving it the grace of Jesus who died and rose again. These words are like a bridge, like the underpass that connects the Cathedral of Jakarta to the largest Mosque in Asia. There, I saw that fraternity is the future, it is the answer to anti-civilization, to the diabolical plots of hatred and war – also sectarianism. There is brotherhood, fraternity.

I rediscovered the beauty of an outbound missionary Church in Papua New Guinea, an archipelago stretching out towards the immensity of the Pacific Ocean. There, the diverse ethnic groups speak over eight hundred languages – eight hundred languages are spoken there – an ideal environment for the Holy Spirit, who loves to make the message of love resonate in the symphony of languages. What the Holy Spirit makes is not uniformity, it is symphony, harmony; He is the patron, He is the master of harmony. There, in a particular way, the protagonists have been and still are the missionaries and catechists. I rejoiced to be able to stay a while with the missionaries and catechists of today; and I was moved to listen to the young people’s songs and music: in them, I saw a new future, without tribal violence, without dependency, without ideological and economic colonialism; a future of fraternity and care for the wondrous natural environment. Papua New Guinea can be a “laboratory” for this model of integral development, inspired by the “leaven” of the Gospel. Because there is no new humanity without new men and new women, and only the Lord makes these. And I would also like to mention the visit to Vanimo, where the missionaries are between the forest and the sea. They enter the forest in search of the most hidden tribes, there... that is a beautiful memory.

The power of the Christian message of human and social promotion is particularly evident in the history of Timor-Leste. There, the Church has shared the independence process with the entire population, always guiding it towards peace and reconciliation. It is not a matter of the

ideologization of faith, no; it is faith that becomes culture and at the same time enlightens it, purifies it, elevates it. This is why I relaunched the fruitful relationship between faith and culture, to which Saint John Paul II had pointed in his visit. Faith must be inculturated and cultures must be evangelized. Faith and culture. But above all, I was struck by the beauty of the people: a people who have endured much but are joyful, a people wise in suffering. A population that not only bears a lot of children – there was a sea of children, so many, eh? – but also teaches them how to smile. I will never forget the smile of the children of that land, of that region. The children there smile all the time, and there are many of them. That faith teaches them to smile, and this is a guarantee for the future. In short, in Timor-Leste I saw the youthfulness of the Church: families, children, young people, many seminarians and aspirants to consecrated life. I would like to say, without exaggeration, that I breathed the “air of springtime” there!

The last stop on this journey was *Singapore*. A country very different to the other three: a city-State, ultra-modern, an economic and financial hub for Asia and beyond. There, Christians are a minority, but they nonetheless form a lively Church, engaged in fostering harmony and fraternity between the various ethnicities, cultures and religions. Even in wealthy Singapore there are the “little ones”, who follow the Gospel and become salt and light, witnesses to a *hope greater* than what economic gains can guarantee.

I would like to thank these peoples who listened to me with such warmth, with such love, and to thank their governors who helped a great deal with this visit, so that it could be conducted in an orderly manner, without problems. I thank all those who also collaborated in this, and I give thanks to God for the gift of this journey! And I reiterate my gratitude to everyone, to all of them. May God bless the peoples I encountered, and guide them on the way to peace and fraternity! Greetings to all!

Special Greetings

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the groups from England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Cameroon, South Africa, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Canada and the United States. Upon all of you and your families I invoke the joy and the peace of our Lord Jesus. God bless you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters, in my recent Apostolic Journey to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore, I encountered many large and vibrant Christian communities. The

abundant growth the Church has experienced in these countries comes from a living and joyful faith marked by compassion and respect for all God's children, regardless of their religion or culture. This witness, and the concrete experience of fraternity and cooperation with other religions offer the hope for a future of greater justice and harmony in our human family. I thank the various civil and religious authorities for making my visit possible, and I pray that God will guide those countries in the way of prosperity and peace.