



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO COLOMBIA

(6-11 SEPTEMBER 2017)

PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS ON THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM COLOMBIA TO ROME

Papal flight

Sunday, 10 September 2017

[Multimedia]

Pope Francis:

Good evening, and thank you so much for your work. I was quite moved by the joy, the affection, the youthfulness and the nobility of the Colombian people. They are truly a noble people, unafraid to express their feelings, unafraid to feel and to show what they are feeling. That was my impression. This is my third time [in Colombia], as I recall, but a bishop reminded me: “No, there was a fourth time, but only for small meetings”, once at La Ceja and another two or three in Bogotá. But I did not have a deep knowledge of Colombia, what you see on the streets. I am grateful for the testimony of joy, hope and patience amid the sufferings of this people. It was a blessing for me. Thank you.

César Moreno (“Caracol Radio”) [in Spanish]:

Thank you, Your Holiness, and good evening! Before all else, on the part of the Colombian media who are accompanying us here on this trip, all our companions and friends, I would like to thank you for having gone to our country, for having given us so many very beautiful, profound messages, for all the affection and closeness that you have shown to the Colombian people. Holiness, many thanks! My question is this. You came to a country divided by a peace process,

divided between those who accept this peace process and those who do not accept it. What can be done concretely, what steps should be taken, to bring the divided sides closer together, so that they can abandon this hatred, this rancour? If Your Holiness could return to our country in a few years, as you think you might, what sort of a Colombia would you like to see? Thank you.

Pope Francis [starting in Spanish]:

At the least, I would like its motto to be: “Let’s Take a Second Step”, at least that! I thought that there had been more years of guerrilla warfare —around 60, but they tell it has been about 54... And much, much hatred has accumulated, much rancour, a great sickness of the soul. Sickness itself is not a crime; it happens— you come down with measles and you’ve got them.... (Sorry, I’ll speak in Italian...) A sickness of the soul, you just contract it. With this guerrilla warfare, really grave sins were committed that caused this disease of hatred, whether by guerrillas, paramilitaries or those on the other side, to say nothing of persistent corruption in the country. But there are steps forward that offer hope, steps forward in the negotiations. The latest is the ELN (National Liberation Army) cease-fire: I thank them very much for that. There is something else that I noticed – a desire to move beyond this process, beyond the negotiations that are underway and are necessary. It is a spontaneous desire, and expresses the strength of the people. I find hope in this. The people want to “breathe”, but we have to help them, to help them with our closeness, our prayers, and above all, with our understanding of how much pain is still there in so many people.

José Mojica (“El Tiempo”) [in Spanish]:

Holy Father, it is an honour to be here with you. My name is José Mojica. I am a journalist with “El Tiempo”, a Colombian publishing house – and I greet you also in the name of my Colombian colleagues and of all the communications media in my country. Colombia has endured many decades of violence on account of war, armed conflict and drug trafficking. But the harm done by political corruption has been just as devastating as the war itself, and even though corruption is not something new – we have always known it was there, it has always existed – now it is all more visible because we are no longer hearing news about the war, the armed conflict. What needs to be done in the face of this scourge? Up to what point should corrupt people be tolerated? How should they be punished? And finally, should the corrupt be excommunicated?

Pope Francis [starting in Spanish]:

You are asking a question that I have asked myself many times. This is how I put it: Can a corrupt person be forgiven? This is what I asked myself when, in the province of Catamarca, in Argentina, there was a case of mistreatment, abuse and violence involving a young girl. There were people implicated who were closely connected to the political and economic powers in that province. I was struck by an article by Frigerio published at the time in “La Nación”. I wrote a small book

entitled “Sin and Corruption”. All of us are sinners. We know that the Lord is close to us and that he constantly forgives us. But there is a difference: God never tires of forgiving, and sinners find the courage to beg his forgiveness. The problem is that the corrupt person gets tired of begging forgiveness and even forgets how to. This is the grave problem; they are no longer sensitive to values, to the destruction and exploitation of people. They are not capable of begging forgiveness. It is as if they are already condemned. In this sense, it is very, very difficult to help a corrupt person. But God can do it. I pray for this.

Hernan Reyes (“Télam”):

Your Holiness, this question is from a group of Spanish-speaking journalists. You spoke of this first step that Colombia has taken. Today at the Mass, you said that dialogue between the two sides was not enough, that it was necessary to get others involved. Do you think that it is possible to replicate this Colombian model for other conflicts in the world?

Pope Francis:

Getting others involved.... I spoke about this today in my homily, based on a passage of the Gospel. Getting others involved: this is not the first time. Others have been involved in many conflicts. It is a way of going forward, a wise, political way, having the wisdom to ask for help. As I mentioned in the homily (which was more a message than a homily), I think such technical political resources can help. Sometimes they require intervention by the United Nations to overcome a crisis. Still, a peace process goes forward only when the people take it in hand. If the people do not take it in hand, it may progress slightly, a compromise can be achieved... This is what I wanted to state in this visit: unless the people are the protagonists of pacification, it will progress only to a certain point. But when the people take something in hand, they are capable of doing it well. That is best way. Thank you.

Elena Pinardi (EBU-UER):

Good evening, Holiness. First of all, we would like to ask you how you are. We all saw that you bumped your head. Did you hurt yourself?

Pope Francis:

I bent over to greet some children, I did not see the glass and ... “boom”!

Elena Pinardi:

My question is this. In our flight, we are passing near Hurricane Irma, which has caused dozens of deaths and enormous damage in the Caribbean Islands and Cuba; it is feared that large areas of

Florida may end up under water. Six million people have had to leave their homes. After Hurricane Harvey, there have been three hurricanes in the area more or less at the same time.

Scientists believe that the warming of the oceans is a factor that contributes to intensifying storms and seasonal hurricanes. Is there a moral responsibility on the part of political leaders who refuse to cooperate with other nations in controlling greenhouse gas emissions, because they deny that climate change is also man-made?

Pope Francis:

Thank you. I will start with the last part, so as not to forget it. Those who deny this have to go to the scientists and ask them. Scientists speak very clearly; they are precise. The other day, the news came out about the ship (I think it was Russian) that went from Norway to Japan or Taipei by crossing the North Pole, without an ice breaker, with photographs showing floating pieces of ice.... You can now pass through the North Pole! It is quite clear, quite clear. When this news came out, from a university – I don't recall where – another story appeared, saying: "We have only three years to reverse the situation; otherwise the consequences will be frightening". I do not know if the "three years" is true or not; but if we do not turn around, we will go under, that much is true.

We can see the effects of climate change and the scientists clearly indicate the road to take. All of us have a responsibility, each one of us. Everyone has a moral responsibility, whether large or small, in accepting, offering opinions or making decisions. We have to take this seriously. I don't think it is something we can joke about; it is quite serious. You asked me about moral responsibility. Each person has his or her own. The politicians have theirs too. Each has his or her own. According to the answer he or she gives.

Elena Pinardi:

There are those who feel that we are moving toward the cataclysm with all these atmospheric events....

Pope Francis: That I don't know. What I would say is this. First, everyone has a specific moral responsibility. Second, if people have any doubts about the matter, they should ask the scientists. They are extremely clear about this. They are not just venting opinions, they are extremely clear. Then let them decide for themselves. History will judge their decisions. Thank you.

Enzo Romeo (RAI):

Good evening, Holy Father. I would like to go back to the same question my colleague asked, because in your addresses in Colombia, you often called attention to the need to make peace with creation, to respect the environment, as a necessary condition for stability and peace in society.

We see the effects of climate change in Italy, too: I don't know if you are informed; there have been many deaths in Livorno....

Pope Francis:

Yes, and after three-and-a-half months of drought.

Enzo Romeo:

Precisely. Lots of damage in Rome, too... So we are all concerned about this situation. But why is it taking so long to act on it? Especially on the part of governments, which seem to be concerned about other areas... Then there is the issue of weapons. We are witnessing, for example, the crisis in Korea. I would like to have your opinion on this too.

Pope Francis:

The reason why? A phrase from the Old Testament comes to mind, "Man lacks understanding", he is stubborn and does not see. The only animal in creation to put its foot back in the same hole is man; horses and the other animals do not. It is proud and presumptuous to say, "No, that isn't so..." Then there is mammon, the god of the pocket... Not only the environment; many issues, many decisions, many conflicts, have to do with money. Today, in Cartagena, I started on one side, let's call it the poor side, of the city. The other side, the tourist part, is opulent, an opulence without moral restraints, let us say. Do those who go there not notice this? Do the socio-political analysts not see this? "Man lacks understanding", the Bible said. When we don't want to see something, we don't see it. We only look at one side. As for North Korea, to tell you the truth, I don't really understand it, I don't really understand that world of geopolitics, I find it very hard. For what little I do see, there is a conflict of interests that I find hard to explain. But the other thing is important. We fail to notice. Think of Cartagena, today. This is an unjust situation, but are we able to recognize this? These are my thoughts.

Valentina Alazraki ("Televisa"):

(begins by asking Pope Francis how he is)

Pope Francis [in Spanish]:

It doesn't hurt. They gave me a black eye.... [laughter]

Valentina Alazraki:

We are sorry all the same. Even if you didn't hurt yourself, we are sorry. Your Holiness, every time you meet young people, in whatever part of the world, you always tell them: "Do not let them rob you of hope; do not let them rob you of joy and of a future". Unfortunately, in the United States the law for the "dreamers" has been overturned. We are talking about 800 thousand young

people, many of them Mexicans and Colombians, from many countries. Don't you think that this will cause these young people to lose their joy, their hope, their future? And then, if I may take advantage of your kindness and that of our colleagues, I would ask you to offer a little prayer, a small thought, for all the victims of the earthquake in Mexico and of Hurricane Irma. Thank you.

Pope Francis:

I asked you about what law you were referring to. I have heard about it, but I have not been able to read the articles and the details of the decision. I am not very familiar with it, but, first, separating young people from their families is not something that bears good fruit, for the young people or for the family. I believe the decision does not come from the Congress but from the executive branch. If that is the case, and I am not certain, there is a hope that it somehow can be re-thought. I have listened to the President of the United States: he considers himself "pro-life" and if he is a good pro-life person, he understands that the family is the cradle of life and that its unity needs to be defended. So I am interested in taking a closer look at the decision. But more generally, whether this case or other cases, whenever young people feel used, as often happens, in the end they feel desperate. What robs them of hope? Drugs, other addictions, suicide....

Youth suicide is extremely serious; it happens when young people are cut off from their roots. A young person's relationship with his or her roots is very important. Today's uprooted young people are asking for help: they want to rediscover their roots. That is why I talk so much about the need for dialogue between young people and the elderly, even bypassing parents somewhat.

Young people should dialogue with their parents, but the elderly [are important], because that is where their roots are; in the case of the elderly, those roots are a little more distant and that can make it more easy to touch them, easier perhaps than talking to one's parents. All the same, young people today do need to rediscover their roots. Anything that goes against their roots robs them of hope. I do not know if I have responded....

Valentina Alazraki:

Those young people can be deported from the United States....

Pope Francis:

True enough, they lose a root.... It is a problem. But really I don't want to express an opinion on that case because I have not read about it, and I don't like to speak about something I haven't first studied. Besides, Valentina is Mexican, and Mexico has suffered a great deal. So, I ask everyone for solidarity with [her] and a prayer for her country. Thank you.

Fausto Gasparroni (ANSA):

Your Holiness, on behalf of the Italian group, I would like to ask you about the issue of migrants.

Specifically, because the Italian Church recently expressed – let's put it this way – a certain understanding with regard to the new government policies on restricting departures from Libya and consequently arrivals [on Italian territory]. It has also been reported that you had a meeting with Prime Minister Gentiloni on the matter. We would like to know whether the meeting did take place, whether that issue was discussed, and most of all, what you think about this policy of stopping departures, also in view of the fact that the migrants who remain in Libya – and this too has been documented – are living in inhuman conditions, in extremely precarious conditions. Thank you.

Pope Francis:

First, the meeting with Prime Minister Gentiloni was a personal meeting, and did not concern this issue. It took place before this problem arose; the problem came up a few weeks later, maybe a month later. So it was before the problem. Second, I feel much obliged to Italy and Greece, because they have opened their hearts to migrants. Yet opening our hearts is not enough. We do need to open our hearts, first and always; this is also one of God's commandments, to welcome others; "You too were a slave, a migrant in Egypt" (cf. *Lev 19:33-34*), as the Bible tells us. All the same, governments have to manage this with the virtue proper to governance, which is prudence. Meaning what? First, how many places do we have available? Second, not just to accept, but to integrate. Here in Italy, I have seen marvellous examples of integration. When I went to the Roma III University, four students asked me questions. While the last one was asking her question, I kept looking at her and thinking: "I know that face..." Less than a year ago, she had travelled with me on the plane from Lesbos. She learned Italian and because she was studying biology in her country, she did her equivalency and continued her studies. She learned the language. This is what it means to *integrate*. On another flight – returning from Sweden, I think – I spoke of Sweden's integration policy as a model, but Sweden too has prudently said: "This is the number; more than this we cannot handle", because of the danger of non-integration. Third, there is the humanitarian issue that you mentioned. Is the world aware of these camps, of the conditions there, in the desert? I have seen photographs... Exploiters exist. You spoke of the Italian government. I think they are doing everything possible to provide humanitarian assistance, and to solve a problem that they cannot take on... But [to sum up]: always an open heart, prudence, integration and humanitarian assistance.

There is one last thing I would like to say, and it is mostly true for Africa. There is, in our collective unconscious a motto, a principle: "Africa is there to be exploited". In Cartagena today we saw one example of human exploitation, in the case of the slaves. One head of state put it nicely: "People fleeing from war, that is one problem; but as for all those fleeing from hunger, we need to invest there, for their growth". Still, in our collective unconscious there is the idea that whenever developed countries go to Africa, it is to exploit it. We have to turn this around: Africa is a friend and should be helped to grow. Then, the other problems, the wars, go elsewhere. I don't know if I have made things clear....

Xavier Le Normand (I.Media):

Good evening, Holy Father. Today you spoke about Venezuela after the Angelus. You called for the rejection of every form of violence in political life. Thursday, after the Mass in Bogotá, you greeted five Venezuelan bishops. We all know that the Holy See has been very committed to promoting dialogue in that country. For months now, you have been calling for an end to all violence. But President Maduro lashes out against the bishops on the one hand, while on the other he says that he is with Pope Francis. Would it be possible to have more forceful and perhaps clearer words? Thank you, your Holiness.

Pope Francis:

I believe that the Holy See has spoken out forcefully and clearly. What President Maduro says, it is up to him to explain; I don't know what his thoughts are. But the Holy See has done a lot. It sent a high-level Nuncio to the working group of the four ex-Presidents, and it has spoken with individuals and spoken out publicly. I myself have mentioned the situation frequently at the Angelus, always trying to find a solution and to offer help in finding a way out. I don't know... But the whole matter appears quite difficult. The most painful part is the humanitarian problem: all those people who are fleeing or suffering... It is a humanitarian problem that somehow we have to help resolve. I think that the United Nations should make its voice heard there too, to help... Thank you.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, your Holiness, I think we have to go.

Pope Francis:

They are telling me that there is some turbulence and that we need to go. But I thank you all very much for your work. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude for the example given by the Colombian people. I would like to end with an image, one that struck me most about Colombians. In the four cities, there were crowds in the streets to greet me... What struck me most is that fathers and mothers were lifting their children up to show them to the Pope, so that the Pope could bless them. It was as if they were saying: "Here is my treasure, here is my hope, here is my future, and I have faith in it". This impressed me. Their affection. The eyes of those fathers and mothers. It was beautiful! It is a symbol, a symbol of hope for the future. A people capable of making children and showing them, showing them that way, as if to say, "this is my treasure", is a people that has hope and has a future. Thank you very much.

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