



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Audience with the directors and staff of ITA Airways

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the directors and employees of ITA Airways, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

Thank you for your presence, thank you for “landing” here, in the Vatican. I am pleased” And I welcome you with pleasure: in a way you represent “the Pope’s wings”, because you enable me to fly to the ends of the earth, bearing the Gospel of hope and peace. At times I think: if Saint Paul had had the possibility of travelling by air, what would have happened?

And indeed, this happened with a Pope who bore his name. It was 4 January 1964 when Saint Paul VI boarded an Alitalia DC8 – those DC8s that have been retired now – the first Pontiff in history to undertake an apostolic journey by air. Pope Montini greatly desired the journey in the Holy Land, short but very intense. He had announced it to the Council Fathers with enthusiasm and emotion, at the end of the second session of Vatican II. That flight, departing from Rome-Fiumicino and arriving in Amman, inaugurated papal flights in the world: a new way of performing the Pope’s pastoral ministry, which enabled the Bishop of Rome to reach very many people who would never have been able to make a pilgrimage to Rome. After that first journey, Saint Paul VI made a further eight, touching all the continents.

Then, with Saint John Paul II – he was good – who in the twenty-seven years of his pontificate made 104 international journeys, this form of mission became an integral part of the pontificate. In this way, his successor Benedict XVI continued to travel, and so I too continued to travel: in two weeks’ time, God willing, I will leave for my 41st pilgrimage, by going to visit Hungary. And then there will be Marseille, then Mongolia... and all these things that are on the waiting list.

The Italian national carrier, which you represent here, usually accompanies the Successor of Peter and his entourage on the outward journey; and in some cases, it also accompanies them on the return journey and on internal transfers, or from one country to another within the same journey. It is a very valuable service, which requires competence, care and attention to many details, including the challenging logistics: the Pope, who - as you see - has some mobility problems, knows this well, but thanks to your help he continues to travel!

For me it is important to meet people, to meet communities, the faithful, believers of other religions, women and men of good will... Meeting people, speaking in person, is different to being present with a message, or perhaps a video. It is not the same... The Pope travels to confirm brothers in the faith, to be close to those who suffer, to help those who are committed to peace. All this is possible also thanks to you. Therefore, I thank you and, as long as God wills, we will continue to fly together.

Dear friends, I wish you the best in your work. And thank you for this visit, thank you very much. May Our Lady accompany you. I wholeheartedly bless you and your families, And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
