



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore (2 to 13 September 2024) – Meeting with the bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists at the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians

This afternoon, at the end of his visit to the children of Street Ministry and Callan Services, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, where he met with the bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and with priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed by the archbishop of Port Moresby, His Eminence Cardinal John Ribat, M.S.C., the president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Bishop Otto Separy of Bereina, the rector of the Shrine, and two children in traditional dress who gave him a floral tribute. On reaching the side entrance, where the rector brought him the cross and holy water for aspersion, the Holy Father proceeded along the central nave while the choir sang a hymn.

After the welcome address from the president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, followed by testimonies from a religious sister, a priest, a catechist and a representative of the Synod on synodality, Pope Francis delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting, after the blessing, the exchange of gifts and a group photograph with the bishops, the Pope paused briefly on the terrace to greet the faithful present in the adjacent courtyard. He then returned by car to the Apostolic Nunciature.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father during the meeting with the bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, with the priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good evening!

I greet you all with affection: Bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, seminarians and catechists. I thank the President of the Bishops' Conference for his words, as well as James, Grace, Sister Lorena and Father Emmanuel for their testimonies.

I am pleased to be here, in this beautiful Salesian church: the Salesians know how to do things well. I congratulate you! This is a diocesan shrine dedicated to *Mary Help of Christians* – I was baptized in the parish of *Mary Help of Christians* in Buenos Aires – a title so dear to Saint John Bosco; or *Maria Helpim* as you affectionately invoke her here. In 1844, when Our Lady inspired Don Bosco to build a church in her honour in Turin, she made him this promise: "Here is my home, from here my glory". Mary promised him that if he had the courage to begin the construction of the church, great graces would then follow. And so it happened: the church was built – it is marvellous – but the one in Buenos Aires is more beautiful! – and it has become a centre for allowing the Gospel to shine forth, forming young people and carrying out works of charity, a reference point for so many people.

The beautiful shrine we find ourselves in now, which is inspired by that story, can be a symbol also for us of three aspects of our Christian and missionary journey that were highlighted in the testimonies we just heard: the *courage to begin*, the *beauty of being present*, and the *hope of growing*.

First, the *courage to begin*. The builders of this shrine began their undertaking with a great act of faith, which has borne fruit. Yet it was only possible because of so many other courageous beginnings by those who had gone before them. Missionaries arrived in this country at the middle of the nineteenth century, and the first steps of their ministry were not easy. Indeed some attempts failed. However, they did not give up; with great faith, apostolic zeal and many sacrifices, they continued to preach the Gospel and serve their brothers and sisters, starting again many times whenever they failed.

The stained glass windows in the shrine remind us of this – which cannot be seen now because it is night –, the sunlight smiles on us through the faces of the saints and blessed, women and men from all backgrounds, connected to the history of your community: Peter Chanel, John Mazzucconi and Peter To Rot, martyrs of New Guinea, and also Teresa of Calcutta, John Paul II, Mary McKillop, Maria Goretti, Laura Vicuña, Zeffirino Namuncurà, Francis de Sales, John Bosco, Mary Domenica Mazzarello. All brothers and sisters who, in different ways and at different times began initiatives and forged paths, only to begin again many times over. They contributed to bringing the Gospel to you, together with a colourful wealth of charisms animated by the same Spirit and the same charity of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12:4-7; *2 Cor* 5:14). It is thanks to them, to their "starts" and "restarts", – missionaries are women and men of "starting", and if they come back, of "restarting": this is the life of the missionary, starting and restarting –, it is thanks to them that we are here and that despite the current challenges, which are not lacking, we continue to move forward without fear – I do not know if we always do so –, knowing that we are not alone. It is the Lord who acts in us and with us (cf. *Gal* 2:20), making us, like them, instruments of his grace (cf. *1 Pet* 4:10). This is our vocation: to be instruments.

In this regard, and in the light of what we have heard, I would like to recommend an important direction for your own "starts", namely the peripheries of this country. I think of people belonging to the most deprived segments of urban populations, as well as those who live in the most remote and abandoned areas, where sometimes basic necessities are lacking. I think too of the marginalized and wounded, both morally and physically, by prejudice and superstition, sometimes to the point of having to risk their lives, as James and Sister Lorena reminded us. The Church desires especially to be close to these brothers and sisters, because in them Jesus is present in a special way (cf. *Mt* 25:31-40). And where he, our head, is present, there are we, his members, for we belong to the same body, "joined and knit together by every ligament" (*Eph* 4:16). And please do not forget: closeness, closeness! You know that the three most beautiful attitudes are *closeness, compassion and tenderness*. If a consecrated woman or a consecrated man, a priest, a bishop or deacons are not close, are not compassionate and are not tender, they do not have the Spirit of Jesus. Do not forget this: closeness, compassion, tenderness.

This brings us to the second aspect: the *beauty of being present*. We can see it symbolized in the *kina shells*, a

sign of prosperity that adorns the presbytery of this church. They remind us that we are the most beautiful *treasure* in the eyes of the Father. Close to Jesus and under the mantle of Mary, we are spiritually united with all our brothers and sisters whom the Lord has entrusted to us, and with those who cannot be here, ignited by the desire that the whole world may know the Gospel and share in its power and light.

James asked how can we convey the enthusiasm for mission to young people. I do not think there are “techniques” for that. One proven way, however, is to cultivate and share with them our joy of being the Church (cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass of Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate*, Aparecida, 13 May 2007), a welcoming home made up of living, chosen and precious stones, placed by the Lord next to each other and cemented by his love (cf. *1 Pet.* 2:4-5). As Grace’s experience of the Synod reminds us, by esteeming and respecting one another and putting ourselves at the service of one another, we can show everyone we meet how beautiful it is to follow Jesus together and proclaim his Gospel.

The *beauty of being present*, then, is experienced not so much at large events and moments of success, but rather in the faithfulness and love with which we strive to grow together every day.

Now we come to the third and final aspect: the *hope of growing*. In this shrine there is an interesting “catechesis through images” incorporating the crossing of the Red Sea, and the figures of Abraham, Isaac and Moses. They are the Patriarchs made fruitful through faith, who received a gift of numerous offspring because they believed (cf. *Gen* 15:5; 26:3-5; *Ex* 32:7-14). This is an important symbol, because it also encourages us today to have confidence in the fruitfulness of our apostolate, continuing to sow tiny seeds of good in the furrows of the world. They may seem tiny, like a mustard seed, but if we trust and do not stop scattering them, by God’s grace they will sprout, yield an abundant harvest (cf. *Mt* 13:3-9) and produce trees capable of welcoming the birds of the air (cf. *Mk* 4:30-32). Saint Paul reminds us that the growth of what we sow is not our own work, but the Lord’s (cf. *1 Cor* 3:7). Holy Mother Church teaches the same thing when emphasizing that even with our own efforts, God is the one “who makes his kingdom to come on earth” (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 42). Let us continue, therefore, to evangelize patiently, without allowing ourselves to be discouraged by difficulties or misunderstandings, even when they arise in places where we especially do not want to encounter them: in the family, for example, as we have heard.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank the Lord together for how the Gospel has taken root and continues to spread in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Carry on your mission as witnesses of *courage, beauty and hope*! And do not forget the style of God: closeness, compassion and tenderness. Always move forward with this style of the Lord! I thank you for what you are doing, and I bless you all from my heart. And I ask you, please, do not forget to pray for me, because I need it. Thank you!
