



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MEETING BETWEEN POPE PAUL VI AND PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS IN JERUSALEM

(24-26 MAY 2014)

***INTERVIEW OF POPE FRANCIS WITH JOURNALISTS
DURING THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM THE HOLY LAND***

Papal Flight

Monday, 26 May 2014

(Father Lombardi)

We thank the Pope very much for being here. After so exhausting a journey, he has been willing to meet us. So we're very grateful to him.

We have organized ourselves – the journalists worked this out on their own – in some of the major language groups, which will present a few people to ask questions. I have not put any limits on them, because I know that you are willing to give them free scope... unless you yourself would like to say something first by way of introduction... Let us go to the questions.

The first question is from the Italian group:

Q. Holy Father, in these days you performed gestures which made the rounds of the whole world: putting your hand on the wall in Bethlehem, making the sign of the cross, embracing the survivors today at Yad Vashem, but also kissing the Holy Sepulchre yesterday with Bartholomaios, and so forth. We wanted to ask you if you had thought beforehand about all these gestures, decided on them. Why did you choose them and what do you think will be the effect of these gestures, in addition, naturally, to the grandiose gesture of inviting Peres and Abu Mazen to the Vatican...

R. Gestures, the most authentic gestures, are not those you think about beforehand, but the ones that come naturally, no? I thought: "Something might be done", but the concrete gestures, none of these was planned as such. Some things, for example inviting the two Presidents to pray, we had thought of doing there, but there were so many logistical problems, so very many, since they also have to take account of the territory, where it would take place, and that is not easy. So we thought of a meeting... but in the end we came up with this invitation which I hope will turn out well. But [the gestures] weren't thought out beforehand and .. I don't know, I get the idea of doing something, but it's spontaneous, that's the way it is. At least, to tell the truth, an idea that "something could be done", but the concrete [gesture] did not come to me. For example, at Yad Vashem, nothing [came]; and then it did. That is what happened.

(Father Lombardi)

Good. Now a second question comes from the English language group.

Q. You have spoken out forcefully against the sexual abuse of minors by the clergy, by priests. You created a special commission to improve the way this problem is handled at the level of the universal Church. Practically speaking: we now know that in all the local Churches there are norms which impose a serious moral and often legal duty to cooperate with local civil authorities, in one way or another. What would you do in the case of a bishop who clearly did not respect, didn't follow, these obligations?

R. In Argentina, we say that people who get special treatment are "Daddy's little baby". As far as this problem is concerned, there will be no such "little babies". Right now three bishops are under investigation. Three, and one has already been convicted and his punishment is being decided. There is no special treatment. The abuse of minors is truly a horrible crime... We know that it is a serious problem everywhere, but my concern is about the Church. A priest who does this betrays the body of the Lord, because this priest is supposed to lead this boy or girl, this young man or woman, to holiness. And these young people, these children are trusting... and then instead of leading them to holiness, he abuses them. And this is extremely serious! It is like... let me give just one example: it is like saying a black mass. You are supposed to lead them to holiness and you create a life-long problem for them ... In the near future, at Santa Marta, there will be a Mass with some persons who have been abused, followed by a meeting: with them and myself, along with Cardinal O'Malley, who is part of the commission. But on this issue we need to keep moving forward: zero tolerance.

(Father Lombardi)

Thank you, Your Holiness. And now the Spanish language group.

Q. From the first day of your pontificate you have sent this clear message about a Church which is

poor and for the poor, poor in simplicity, austerity. What do you plan to do to eliminate things which contradict this message of austerity? (The question went on to speak about situations recently reported in the press, including a transaction at the IOR involving 15 million euro).

A. The Lord Jesus once said to his disciples – it is in the Gospel: “It is inevitable that there will be scandals...” We are human beings, all of us are sinners. And there will be scandals, there will be. The issue is to prevent more from happening! In the administration of finances, honesty and transparency [are essential]. The two commissions, the one which studied the IOR and the other which studied the Vatican as a whole, have reached their conclusions and offered proposals, and now, the ministry (we can call it that), the Secretariat for the Economy headed by Cardinal Pell, will pursue the reforms which these commissions recommended. But there will be inconsistencies, they will always be there because we are human, and so reform has to be ongoing. The Fathers of the Church used to say: “Ecclesia semper reformanda”. We have to be concerned to reform the Church day by day, because we are sinners, we are weak, and there are going to be problems. The administrative reorganization which the Secretariat for the Economy is working on will greatly help to avoid scandals, problems... For example, at the IOR I believe that at this point some... 1,600 accounts have been closed, belonging to people who are not entitled to have an account at the IOR. The IOR is meant to assist the Church: bishops of dioceses are entitled to have an account there, as well as employees of the Vatican and their widows or widowers, for their pensions.. That is what it is meant for. But other private individuals do not have that right...embassies, but only during the time of their embassy and not thereafter. It is not something open. And it is a good thing to close accounts which have no business being there. I would like to say one thing: in asking your question you brought up that matter of the 15 million euro. It is being looked into, the whole affair is not clear. It could be true, but at this time nothing definitive has been established: the problem is being studied, to be fair. Thank you.

(Father Lombardi)

Now it is the turn of the French language group.

Q. Holy Father, after the Middle East, we are now returning to Europe. Are you concerned about the growth of populism in Europe, which was once again evident yesterday in the European elections?

A. In these days, I have barely had time to pray the Our Father! ... I really don't know anything about the elections, really. I don't have information about who won, who didn't win. I haven't seen the news. When you say populism, in what sense do you mean it?

Q. In the sense that many Europeans are afraid nowadays; they think that there is no future for Europe. Unemployment is high and the anti-Europe party has made great gains in these elections...

A. This is something I have been hearing about. About Europe, about people's confidence or lack of confidence in Europe. And about the euro, how some people want to turn back... I don't know a lot about these things. But you said a key word: unemployment. This is serious. It is serious because I see it this way, putting it simply. We are in a world economic system which is centred on money, not on the human person. A genuine economic system is centred on man and woman, the human person. Today money is at the centre. To maintain itself, its equilibrium, this system has to adopt certain "throwaway" measures. So you throw away children – the birth rate in Europe is not very high! I believe that in Italy it stands at 1.2%; in France, you have 2%, maybe a little more; in Spain, less than Italy – I don't know if it even reaches 1%... Children are discarded. The elderly are discarded: old people are not useful; in the present situation, at this moment, we visit them because they are retired and needy, but it is a matter of the present situation. The elderly are also discarded with situations of hidden euthanasia in many countries. In a word, they are given medical care to a certain point, and then... And right now young people are being discarded and this is something very serious. It is extremely serious. In Italy, I believe that the rate of unemployment among the young is nearly 40%, I'm not sure. In Spain, I am sure that it is about 50%. And in Andalusia, in southern Spain, it is 60%! This means that there is an entire generation which is "neither-nor": they neither study nor work, and this is something really serious! A generation of young people is being thrown away. For me, this throwaway culture is extremely serious. But it is not only in Europe, it is a bit everywhere, but in Europe we really feel it. A comparison can be made with the culture of well-being, ten years ago. And this is tragic. It is a difficult moment. It is an inhumane economic system. I didn't hesitate to write in the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that this economic system kills. And I repeat this. I don't know if to some extent I have addressed your concern... Thank you.

(Father Lombardi)

It is now the turn of the Portuguese language group.

Q. Holiness, I would like to ask you how should the "Jerusalem question" be resolved, so as to obtain a lasting and, as you have said, stable peace? Thank you.

A. There are many proposals about the Jerusalem question. The Catholic Church, we can say the Vatican, has its own position from a religious perspective: it will be the city of peace of the three religions. This from a religious standpoint. The concrete measures for peace must emerge from negotiations. There have to be negotiations. I would be in agreement if from negotiations, there might come forward this part: it will be capital of one state, of another... But these are conjectures. I am not saying: "It has to be this way", no. These are proposals which have to be negotiated. Really, I don't feel competent to say, "This or that should be done", because it would be madness on my part. But I believe that one has to enter into negotiations with honesty, a spirit of fraternity and mutual trust. And there everything is negotiated: all the territory, also the relations. Courage is needed to do this, and I fervently pray to the Lord that these two leaders, these two governments,

will have the courage to go forward. This is the only path to peace. I only say what the Church must say and has always said: Jerusalem should be preserved as the capital of the three religions, as a point of reference, as a city of peace – I was also about to say “sacred”, but that is not the right word – but [a city] of peace and [a] religious [city].

(Father Lombardi)

Thank you, Holiness. Now we call upon the representative of the German language.

Q. Thank you, Holiness. During your pilgrimage, you spoke at length, and on a number of occasions met with Patriarch Bartholomaios. We were wondering if you also spoke about concrete means of rapprochement, if you also had occasion to speak of this. I wonder also if perhaps the Catholic Church could be able to learn something from the Orthodox Churches – I am speaking of married priests, a question which many Catholics in Germany consider urgent. Thank you.

A. But the Catholic Church has married priests, no? Greek Catholics, Coptic Catholics, no? They exist, in the Eastern rites, there are married priests. Because celibacy is not a dogma of faith, it is a rule of life which I highly esteem and I believe is a gift for the Church. Since it is not a dogma of faith, the door is always open: at this time we have not spoken about this, as a programme, at least not now. We have more important things to do. With Bartolomaios, this subject was not broached because it is secondary, really, in our relations with the Orthodox. We spoke about unity, but unity happens along the way, unity is a journey. We can never create unity in a theology conference. He told me something I already knew, namely, that Athenagoras had said to [Paul VI](#): “Let us quietly go forward; we can put all the theologians on an island to carry on their discussions, while we keep walking on in life!” It is true, as I thought it was... No, no, it is true. Bartholomaios himself told me so in these days. To walk together, to pray together, to cooperate on the many things we can do together, to join in helping one another. For example, with our churches. In Rome, and in numerous other cities, many Orthodox communities use Catholic churches at certain times as a help in this moving forward. Another thing about which we spoke, which perhaps the Pan-Orthodox council may do something, is the date of Easter, since it is a little ridiculous: “Tell me when does Christ rise for you?” ... “Next week” ... “For me he rose last week...” Yes, the date of Easter is one sign of unity. And with Bartholomaios we spoke as brothers. We like each other, we tell each other about our difficulties in governance. And one thing we have frequently spoken about is the issue of ecology: he is very concerned [about this], as I am. We have spoken enough to cooperate on a joint project on the issue. Thank you.

(Father Lombardi)

Since here we are not only Europeans or Americans, and so on, but also Asians, let’s now have a question from the representative of the Asian group, since you are also preparing to make trips to Asia.

Q. Your next journey will be in South Korea, and thus I would like to ask you about the Asian countries. In countries close to South Korea – there is no freedom of religion or freedom of expression. What are you thinking of doing on behalf of people who suffer from these situations?

R. As far as Asia is concerned, two trips are planned: this one to South Korea for the meeting with Asian young people, and then, next January, a two-day visit to Sri Lanka and the Philippines, in the areas struck by the typhoon. The problem of the lack of freedom to practice one's religion is not only found in certain Asian countries: in some, yes, but also in other countries of the world. Religious freedom is not something which all countries have. Some exert a more or less light, unobtrusive control; others adopt measures which end up as a true persecution of believers. There are martyrs! There are martyrs, today, Christian martyrs. Catholic and non-Catholics, but martyrs just the same. And in some places one cannot wear a crucifix or have a Bible. You can't teach catechism to children, today! And I believe, I don't think I am mistaken – that nowadays there are more martyrs than in the early days of the Church. We need to draw close to them, prudently in some places, in order to come to their aid; we must pray much for these Churches which suffer: they suffer greatly. Bishops too, and the Holy See, are quietly working to help these countries, the Christians of these countries. But is not an easy thing. For example, I'll tell you one thing. In one country it is prohibited to pray together: it is forbidden. But the Christians there want to celebrate the Eucharist! And there is someone, a worker, who is a priest. And he goes there, to the table, and they make believe they're drinking tea and they celebrate the Eucharist. If the police come, they quickly hide the books and take their tea. This is happening today. It is not easy.

(Father Lombardi)

And now we return to the Italian language group.

Q. Holiness, as Pope you have a great number of commitments and you keep up a very busy schedule, as we have seen these days. If at some point, let's say, some time from now, you feel that you no longer have the strength to carry out your ministry, do you think you would make the same choice as your predecessor, and leave the papacy?

A. I will do what the Lord tells me to do. Pray and seek God's will. But I believe that [Benedict XVI](#) is not a unique case. It so happened that his strength was failing, and in all seriousness – he is a man of faith and very humble – he made this decision. I believe that he is an institution. Seventy years ago, for the most part retired bishops didn't exist. And now, we have plenty of them. What will happen with retired Popes? I believe that we should see him as an institution: he opened a door, the door to retired Popes. Will there be others? God knows. But this door is open. I believe that a Bishop of Rome, a Pope, who feels that his strength is failing – because these days we are living longer – has to ask the same questions that Pope Benedict asked.

(Father Lombardi)

We now return to the English language group.

Q. Holy Father, today you met a group of Holocaust survivors. Obviously, you are well aware that a figure who remains controversial because of his role during the Holocaust is your predecessor, [Pope Pius XII](#). Before becoming Pope, you wrote or said that you held Pius XII in high regard, but that you wanted to see the archives opened before coming to a definite conclusion. So we want to know whether you intend to go ahead with the cause of Pius XII, or will wait for further developments in the process before making a decision. Thank you.

A. Thank you. The cause of Pius XII remains open; I have looked into it. There is still no miracle, and without miracles it cannot proceed. That is where things stand. We have to wait to see how things turn out, how the cause proceeds, and then think about making decisions. But the fact remains that there is no miracle and at least one miracle is needed for beatification. This is where the cause of Pius XII stands today. And I cannot think: "Will I beatify him or not", because it is a slow process. Thank you.

(Father Lombardi)

Now let us go to Argentina for another question from the Spanish language group.

Q. You have become a spiritual leader, and also a political leader, and you are raising many expectations, both within the Church and in the international community. Within the Church, for example, what is going to happen with communion to the divorced and remarried, and in the international community, this mediation with which you surprised the world, for which this meeting will take place in the Vatican... My question is whether you are afraid of failure, after having raised so many expectations. Aren't you afraid of somehow failing? Thank you.

A. First of all, let me clarify something about this meeting in the Vatican. It will be a meeting to pray, not to mediate or to seek solutions, no. We will meet to pray, only. And then each one will go home. But I believe that prayer is important and that praying together without discussions of any kind is helpful. Perhaps I did not explain things well, before this, about what it will involve. It will be a prayer meeting: there will be a rabbi, there will be a Muslim and myself. I have asked the Custos of the Holy Land to organize some of the practical matters.

Second, thank you for your question about the divorced. The Synod will be on the family, the problem of the family, the treasures of the family, the present situation of the family. The preliminary talk which Cardinal Kasper gave had five chapters: four of them were on the family, the beauty of the family, its theological foundations, and problems facing families; while the fifth chapter dealt with the pastoral issue of separations, declarations of marriage nullity, divorced persons... Part of this issue is that of communion. I have not been happy that so many people – even church people, priests – have said: "Ah, the Synod will be about giving communion to the

divorced”, and went straight to that point. I felt as if everything was being reduced to casuistry. No the issue is bigger and wider. Today, as we all know, the family is in crisis, it is in crisis worldwide. Young people don’t want to get married, they don’t get married or they live together. Marriage is in crisis, and so the family is in crisis. I don’t want us to fall into this casuistry of “can we” or “can’t we”? ... So I thank you so much for this question, because it gives me the opportunity to clarify this.

The pastoral problem of the family is complex, very complex. And it has to be looked at case by case. Something Pope Benedict had said on three different occasions about the divorced has been very helpful to me. First, in Valle d’Aosta, another time in Milan, and a the third time in the consistory, the last public consistory which he called for the creation of cardinals. [He said that there is a need] to study the annulment process; to examine the faith with which people enter marriage and to make clear that the divorced are not excommunicated, [even though] they are often treated as if they were. This is something serious: the casuistry of the problem.

The Synod will be on the family: both the rich reality of the family and the problems faced by families. Solutions, annulments, all of this. This problem too, but as part of a larger picture. Now I would like to tell you why the Synod will be on the family: this has been a very powerful spiritual experience for me. During my second year as Pope, Archbishop Eterović, then the Secretary [General] of the Synod, approached me with three themes that the Post-synodal Council had proposed for the forthcoming Synod. The first was very striking, very good: what Jesus Christ brings to contemporary men and women. That was the title, following up on the Synod on evangelization. I agreed, we spoke for bit about changes in the method of the Synod, and at the end, I said: “Let’s add something else: what Jesus Christ brings to contemporary men and women and to the family”. Good. Then, when I went to the first meeting of the Post-synodal Council, I saw that the title was there in full, but gradually people were saying: “Yes, yes, “what he brings to the family”, “what Jesus Christ brings to the family”, and so, without realizing it, the Post-synodal commission ended up speaking about the family. I am sure that it was the spirit of the Lord guiding us even to the choice of this title. I am sure of it, because today the family truly needs so many forms of pastoral assistance. Thank you.

(Father Lombardi)

Now we once more have the French group.

Q. Holiness, can you tell us what the obstacles are to your reform of the Roman Curia, and where it presently stands?

A. Well, the first obstacle is me! (laughter). No, we’re doing well, because it was... I don’t recall the date, but three months, or a little less after my election, that the Council of eight Cardinals was named...

(Father Lombardi)

... one month after the election...

A. ... One month after the election. Then, in early July we had our first meeting and from that time on we have been working. What does the Council do? The Council studies the entire Constitution *Pastor Bonus* and the Roman Curia. It has held consultations worldwide and with the whole Curia, and it is beginning to examine certain things. "This could be done one way, this in another.."
Amalgamating some offices, for example, to streamline the organization... One of the key issues was finances, and the office for the economy will help greatly. It must work together with the Secretary of State, because everything is connected, everything happens together... Presently we have four days of work with this commission in July, and then, in September I think, another four. We are working. We are working hard and the results are not yet all evident, but the financial part is what emerged first, since there were some problems which the press had reported at length, and which we have to examine. The obstacles are the normal obstacles of the whole process. Studying the path... Convincing people is so important. Convincing, helping... Some people who do not see things clearly, but every reform entails this. But I am pleased, I am really pleased. We are working quite hard and this commission greatly assists us. Thank you

(Father Lombardi)

Holiness, thank you for making yourself available; pardon me if I interrupt your conversation. You have been most generous, all the more so following an extraordinary voyage which proved exciting for all of us, perhaps not as much as for yourself, but almost so! We also followed closely your moving spiritual experiences in the holy places; we felt these and they touched us. We hope that the rest of this trip will go well for you, and all the countless other things you have in mind, particularly the prayer meeting which is the natural continuation and completion of this journey. May it bear the fruit which you desire, and which I believe we all desire, for peace in the world. Heartfelt thanks, Your Holiness!

(the Holy Father)

I thank you all for your company, for your kindness... and please, I ask you to pray for me. I need it, so much! Thank you.
