



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to HUNGARY

(28 - 30 APRIL 2023)

BUDAPEST-ROME FLIGHT CONFERENCE

Papal flight

Sunday, 30 April 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Matteo Bruni:

Good afternoon, Your Holiness. Thank you for what you have said these days in your many meetings with different parts of Hungarian society, to some extent in continuity with the meetings you had in September 2021. Thank you too, for this opportunity to continue talking with you about the Journey. Thank you very much.

Pope Francis:

Good evening. Thank you for your work and your presence. These have been three intense but good days. Now you have the floor.

Matteo Bruni:

The first question comes from a Hungarian journalist, Antal Hubai, from Hungarian television:

Antal Hubai - RTL KLUB:

Good evening. Holy Father, we know that you have had several personal experiences with Hungarians throughout your life. Has your impression of them changed, and if so how, after these

present encounters in Hungary?

Pope Francis:

Yes, I had some experiences in the 1960s when I was studying in Chile. There were many Hungarian Jesuits who had to go there because they were thrown out of Hungary. Then too, I was very friendly with the Mary Ward Sisters from Hungary, who ran a school 20 km from Buenos Aires. I used to visit them twice a month and served as a reserve chaplain. Then, there was also an association of Hungarian lay people from Buenos Aires who worked in the Hungarian collegiate church, whom I knew quite well. I didn't understand their idiom, but I caught two words: *gulasch* and *tokaj!* It was a good experience and I was struck by the suffering of the refugees at not being able to go home. The Mary Ward Sisters who had remained behind [in Hungary] were hidden in flats so that the regime would not take them away. Then, I learned more about the whole question of convincing the good Cardinal Mindszenty to come to Rome. I also knew about the enthusiasm of 1956 and then the disappointment that followed. That more or less sums it up.

Matteo Bruni:

... and has your opinion of Hungarians changed after these two short visits?

Pope Francis:

No, it has not changed. Perhaps it has been enriched; enriched in the sense that the Hungarians I met had a great and rich culture. Even those who were not from a high social class, even ordinary people, had a very high basic culture. They usually spoke German or English because Hungarian is not spoken outside of Hungary... It is only spoken in heaven, because they say it takes forever to learn the Hungarian language! My opinion hasn't changed, far from it: I have seen the "style" I already knew.

Matteo Bruni:

The second question is from Eliana Ruggiero of Agi.

Eliana Ruggiero - AGI

Holy Father, you made an appeal to open – to reopen – the doors of selfishness to the poor, to migrants, to those who are "irregular". In your meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, did you ask him to reopen the borders of the Balkan route that he closed? Then, in recent days, you also met Metropolitan Hilarion: can Hilarion and Orbán become channels of openness towards Moscow for accelerating a peace process in Ukraine, or for making possible a meeting between yourself and President Putin? Thank you.

Pope Francis:

I believe that peace is always made by opening channels, and never by being closed. I encourage everyone to open up relationships, channels of friendship. This is not easy. The same address that I made in general, I made to Orbán and I made it a bit everywhere.

On migration: I think this is a problem that Europe must take in hand, because there are five countries that suffer the most: Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy and Spain, since they are the Mediterranean countries and the majority of migrants arrive there. If Europe does not assume responsibility for a fair distribution of migrants, the problem will fall only to those countries. I think Europe must help people to realize that it is a “European *Union*”, also in the face of this challenge.

There is another problem, related to migration, which is the birth rate. There are countries like Italy and Spain where few children are born. Last year I spoke about this at a meeting of families and lately I see that the [Italian] government and other governments are also talking about this. The average age in Italy is 46, in Spain it is even higher, and there are small deserted villages. A migration programme, carried out well on the model that some countries have followed with migration – I think, for example, of Sweden at the time of the Latin American dictatorships – can also help these countries that have a low birth rate.

Then, finally, Hilarion. Hilarion is someone for whom I have much respect, and we have always had a good relationship. He was kind enough to come and see me, and to come to the Mass, and I also saw him here at the airport. Hilarion is an intelligent person with whom one can talk, and such relationships must be maintained, because if we talk about ecumenism, we can then say “I like this, but I don’t like that”... We must extend our hand towards everyone, and also accept the extended hand of others. Since the war began, I have only spoken once with Patriarch Kirill, for 40 minutes on a Zoom call, and then through Anthony, who has taken Hilarion’s place now, and who comes to see me. He is a bishop who was a pastor in Rome and knows the situation well, and through him I am in contact with Kirill. The meeting that we were supposed to have in Jerusalem in July or June last year was cancelled because of the war, but it will have to take place. Then, with the Russians I have a good relationship with the Ambassador, who is now leaving after seven years in the Vatican; he is a fine man, a man *comme il faut*. A serious, cultured, very balanced person. The relationship with the Russians is mainly with this Ambassador. I don’t know if I have said everything...

Eliana Ruggiero:

Could Hilarion and also Orbán somehow accelerate a peace process in Ukraine and also make possible a meeting between yourself and Putin? Could they act, so to speak, as “go-betweeners”?

Pope Francis:

As you can imagine, in our meeting we did not simply talk about “Little Red Riding Hood”. We discussed all these matters. People ask about this because everyone is interested in the path to peace. I am willing, I am ready to do whatever needs to be done. Even now, there is a mission going on, but it is not public yet, we shall see... Once it is public, I will talk about it.

Matteo Bruni:

The third question is from Aura Maria Vistas Miguel, who is here on your left.

Aura Maria Vistas Miguel - Rádio Renascença - Portugal:

Your Holiness, the next visit is to Lisbon, so two things. How is your health? Because we were taken by surprise when you went to hospital; it was said that you had fainted, so do you feel strong enough to meet thousands of young people in Lisbon during those days in August? Then too, would you like to invite a young Ukrainian and a young Russian to World Youth Day as a sign of peace, also for future generations?

Pope Francis:

First of all, my health. What I had was a sudden illness at the end of the Wednesday Audience. I didn't feel like having lunch, so I lay down for a bit. I did not lose consciousness, but there was a high fever, and at three o'clock in the afternoon the doctor immediately brought me to hospital: I had acute and severe pneumonia in the lower lungs. I can tell you this, thanks be to God, because my body, responded well to treatment. Thank God. That is what I had.

Then, Lisbon. The day before I left, I spoke with Bishop Américo [Américo Aguiar, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon and President of the WYD 2023 Foundation] who came to see how things presently stand... Yes, I will go and I hope to manage it. You see, it is not the same as two years ago, but with the cane... things are better, so for the moment my trip is not cancelled. Then, there is the visit to Marseilles, then the visit to Mongolia, and then there is yet another one, I don't recall where... So the programme still keeps me moving, so let's see!

Aura Maria Vistas Miguel:

What about the possibility of a meeting with two young people from Russia and Ukraine?

Pope Francis:

Bishop Américo has something in mind, he told me he is preparing something... He is preparing it carefully.

Matteo Bruni:

The fourth question is from Nicole Winfield, Your Holiness; and then let's see if there is time to...

Nicole Winfield:

Holy Father, I wanted ask you something slightly different. Recently you made a very forceful ecumenical gesture: you donated to Greece three fragments of the Parthenon sculptures from the Vatican Museums. This gesture had also an echo outside of the Orthodox world, since many Western museums are discussing precisely the restitution of objects acquired during the colonial period, as an act of justice towards those persons. I wanted to ask you if you are ready for other gestures of restitution. I think for example of the peoples and the indigenous groups in Canada who requested the return of objects from the Vatican collections as part of the process of reparation for the harm inflicted during the colonial period.

Pope Francis:

This, first of all, is the seventh commandment: if you have stolen, you must make restitution! But there is a whole history. Sometimes wars and colonization lead to these decisions to take good things of the other. This was a just gesture that had to be done: the Parthenon, give something. And if tomorrow the Egyptians come to ask for the obelisk, what will we do? There, a discernment has to be made, in every case. And then, the restitution of indigenous things: this is going on, with Canada, at least we were in agreement to do so. Now I will ask how it is going. The experience had with the native peoples of Canada was very fruitful. Also in the United States, the Jesuits are doing something with that group of native peoples in the United States: the Father General was telling me the other day. But let us go back to restitution. To the extent that one can make restitution, which is a necessary gesture, it is better to do it. There are times when one cannot, there is no political possibility or a real, concrete possibility... But to the extent that one can make restitution, let it be done, please, this is good for all. So as not to get used to putting one's hands in other people's pockets!

Matteo Bruni:

Then, we still have one last question, Eva Fernandez of Radio Cope, who is here...

Eva Fernandez of Cope:

The Prime Minister of Ukraine asked your help in bringing back the children brought by force to Russia; do you think you can help him? Thank you.

Pope Francis:

I think yes, because the Holy See has acted as an intermediary in some exchanges of prisoners, and through the Embassy it has worked well. I think that this too can work well. It is important, at least the Holy See is disposed to do it because it is just, it is something just, and we should help, help that this not be a *casus belli*, but a human case. It is an issue of humanity, before a problem of the spoils of war or a wartime "relocation". All human gestures help, whereas gestures of cruelty do not help. We must do everything humanly possible.

I think too, and I want to say this, of the women who come to our countries: Italy, Spain, Poland, Hungary, all those women who come with children, and their husbands are either dead or fighting the war. True, there is enthusiasm and, at this time, they are receiving help; but we must not lose enthusiasm for doing this because, once enthusiasm fails, these women will remain unprotected, with the danger of falling into the hands of the vultures who are always circling around in search... Let us take care not to lessen our concern to help the refugees. And this is something that everyone can do. Thank you.

Thank you and have a good dinner! But I don't know if it's dinner or just a snack. Thank you so much for your work.