



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
to PORTUGAL
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXXVII WORLD YOUTH DAY
(2 - 6 August 2023)

IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE

Papal flight

Sunday, 6 August 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Matteo Bruni

Good evening, Your Holiness, we are returning rejuvenated and joyful from this World Youth Day, where we were able to encounter the questions and expectations of young people with regard to the Church, the faith, and the world. We were able to listen to the way you responded by your words and by your presence. Now, the journalists have a few questions, but first, if you would like to say something...

Pope Francis

Good evening and thank you for this experience. Today we have a birthday (of the journalist Rita Cruz): Happy birthday! The cake is coming...

Matteo Bruni

The first question this evening is from Aura Maria Vistas Miguel of Rádio Renascença, whom we know well.

Aura Maria Vistas Miguel – Rádio Renascença

Your Holiness, first of all, thank you for your visit to Portugal. Everyone already considers it a great success. Everyone is very pleased; thank you for having come. I spoke to a high-ranking police officer who told me that he had never seen so docile and peaceful a crowd. So it was beautiful, thank you. My question has to do with Fatima. We know that you went there and prayed in silence before Our Lady in the Chapel. Yet there was a great expectation that, in the very place where Our Lady had requested us to pray for the end of the war – since, sadly, at that time we were at war – that the Holy Father would have publically renewed [a plea] for peace. Yesterday, at Fatima, the eyes of the whole world were upon you. Why didn't you do it?

Pope Francis

I prayed. I prayed to Our Lady and I prayed for peace.

I prayed, but without fanfare. And we continually have to repeat this prayer for peace. In the First World War, she asked for this. And this time I asked that of Our Lady. I didn't do so with fanfare.

Matteo Bruni

Thank you, Aura. The second question comes from João Francisco: he is from the Observador, a Portuguese daily.

João Francisco Gonçalves Gomes – Rádio Observador

Many thanks, Holy Father. I'm going to speak in Spanish since it's easier for me, and you can answer in Spanish, since it is easy for Portuguese people to understand. I would like to ask you about child abuse in the Church and in Portugal. This past February, a report was issued on abuse cases in Portugal. Almost 5000 children were victims in recent decades. My question to you is this: did you read, are you aware of, this report that was delivered to the bishops, and what do you think should happen in the case of those bishops who knew of cases of abuse and did not report them to the authorities? Many thanks.

Pope Francis

Good, well, as you know, I met privately with a group of persons who were abused. As I always do in these cases, we spoke about this scourge, this tremendous scourge. In the Church, we acted more or less the same way that even now families and neighbourhoods act: by covering up, right? We think that 42% of abuses, more or less, take place in the family or in neighbourhoods. Still, we have to make progress and help to uncover these things. Until the Boston scandal... there, the Church acknowledged that avoidance was not the way to go: the bull had to be taken by the

horns. Two and a half years later, we had the meeting of Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences. There, official statistics were provided on the problem of abuse. The situation is very serious. In the Church, we constantly talk about zero tolerance. And the bishops who, in some way, did not follow this, (now) have to account for their irresponsibility; we shall see how, case by case. But it is very difficult, this whole matter of abuse, and for this reason, I ask that we be very open about it.

As for the question of how the process is going in the Church in Portugal, it is going well. It is going well and serenely; efforts are being made to take cases of abuse seriously. The numbers sometimes end up being exaggerated; a bit for the comments that we always like to make, but the fact is that things are going well and this gives me a certain peace of mind.

I would like to mention one point, and I ask you as journalists to help with this. Today – you all have your cell phones, right? Good, on one of those cell phones, with a payment and a certain password, you can access sexual abuse with minors. This is coming into our houses, and sexual abuse of minors is being filmed live. Where is it being filmed? Who are those responsible? This is one of the greatest scourges, beyond anything else.... But I want to emphasize this, because at times we do not realize how radical the situation is. When you use a child in order to make a show of abuse, it draws attention. Abuse is like “devouring” the victim, no? Or worse, wounding them and then leaving them alive.

Speaking with abused persons is a very painful experience, but also one that I find helpful. Not because I like hearing these things, but because it helps me to appreciate this tragedy.

So I would answer your question with what I already said: the process is going well, and I am kept abreast of how things are going. Here the news (media) may have exaggerated the situation, but things are going well in this regard. But I would also say to you: in some way, (please) help ensure that a response is given to every kind of abuse. Sexual abuse, but not only. There are other kinds of abuse that cry out to heaven: the abuse of child labour, the abuse of women... Even today, in many countries surgical operations are performed on young girls: their clitoris is excised; this is happening today, they do it with a razor, and there it is... Cruelty. And labor abuse, that is, as part of sexual abuse, and it is serious. And in all this, there is a culture of abuse, which humanity has to realize and experience conversion.

Matteo Bruni

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question, the third, is from Jean-Marie Guénois of Le Figaro, an old friend.

Jean-Marie Guénois – Le Figaro

Holy Father, how are you feeling? How is your health, your convalescence? You didn't read, or

you only read part of, five of your addresses. This is unprecedented in papal journeys. Why? Do you have eye problems? Fatigue? Texts that are too long? How do you feel? And also, please, a little question about France. You will be going to Marseille, and France is happy about that; but you have never visited France. People don't understand: perhaps because it is small, but not small enough... or do you have something against France?

Pope Francis

My health is fine. They took out my stitches and I am leading a normal life. I have a waistband that I have to wear for two or three months to avoid a possible hernia, until the muscles get stronger. But I feel well.

My eyesight: in that parish, I cut short the address because there was a bright light in front of me and I wasn't able to read, so I cut it short. Some of you, through Matteo [Bruni], asked why I cut short the homilies that you received. When I speak – not the “academic” addresses, those I try to do more clearly – when I speak, I always make an effort to communicate. You have seen how even in the “academic” addresses I make some joke or comment that brings a smile, in order to keep communication open. With the young people, the long addresses contained the essence of the message, and I took from them what I felt served communication. You saw how I asked some question, and immediately the response showed me where things were going, whether I was on track or not. Young people don't have a great attention span. Think that, if you make a clear address with an idea, in image, and emotion, they can follow you for eight minutes.

Parenthetically, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, which was my first Exhortation, I wrote a long, long chapter on the homily. Because, homilies – there is parish priest here and he knows this – homilies are sometimes a torture, blah blah blah..., and the people... In some countries, the men leave church to have a smoke and then come back. The Church needs to be converted on this aspect of the homily. Homilies need to be brief and clear, to have a clear message and to be affectionate. That is the reason why I am careful to see how things go over with the young people and try to make them speak. The idea was there, but I cut it short because... For me the idea is important, with the young people. There it is.

And now for France. I went to Strasbourg and I am going to [Marseille](#), but to France, no... There is a problem that concerns me and that is the Mediterranean problem. For this reason, I am going to France. The exploitation of migrants is criminal. Here in Europe no, because things are all right, we are more “refined”, but in the *lager* (concentration camps) of North Africa... I recommend that you read a little book written by a migrant who, in order to go from Guinea to Spain, took, I believe, three years because he was captured, tortured and enslaved. The migrants in those camps of north... it is a terrible situation. At this time – last week – the Mediterranean Association *Saving Humans*, was working to ransom migrants who were in the desert between Tunisia and Libya, because they had left them there to die. The book is entitled *Hermanito*; it can be read in two hours and it is worth it. Read it and you'll see the tragedy of migrants even before they set sail.

The bishops of the Mediterranean will have a meeting, also with several politicians, to reflect seriously on the tragedy of migrants. The Mediterranean is a cemetery, but it is not the biggest cemetery. The biggest cemetery is North Africa. It is terrible, this book: read it. I am going to Marseille for that reason. Last week President Macron told me that he intends to come to Marseille: I will be there a day and a half: I arrive in the afternoon and will be there all the next day.

Jean-Marie Guénois – Le Figaro

So, nothing against France?

Pope Francis

No. In this regard, there is a “policy”: I visit small European countries. The larger countries – Spain, France, England – I leave for later, for the end. But I chose to start with Albania and afterwards the smaller countries. So, nothing. France: two cities Strasbourg and Marseille.

Matteo Bruni

The next question, the fourth, is by Anita Hirschbeck from the German Catholic Press. Go ahead, Anita.

Anita Hirschbeck – KNA (Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur)

Holy Father, in Lisbon you told us that in the Church there is room for “everyone, everyone, everyone”. The Church is open for everyone, but at the same time not everyone has the same rights and opportunities, in the sense that, for example, women and homosexuals cannot receive all the sacraments. Holy Father, how do you explain this inconsistency between an “open Church” and “a Church not equal for all?” Thank you.

Pope Francis

You asked me a question on two different angles. The Church is open for all, then there are rules that regulate life within the Church. And someone who is inside is [so] in accordance with the rules... What you are saying is a very simplistic way of speaking: “One cannot receive the sacraments”. That does not mean that the Church is closed. Each person encounters God in his or her own way, within the Church, and the Church is mother and guide (for) each person along his or her own way. For this reason, I don’t like to say: let everyone come, but then you, do this, and you, do that... Everyone. Thereafter, each person in prayer, in interior dialogue, and in pastoral dialogue with pastoral workers, seeks the way to go forward. For this reason, to ask the question: “What about homosexuals?...” No: everyone. The Lord is clear: the sick and the healthy, old and young, ugly and beautiful, good and bad [...] There is a certain way of looking at things that fails to

understand this membership in the Church as *mother*, but thinks of the Church as a kind of “business”, where, in order to enter, you have to do things this way, and not in that way... The Church’s ministerial structure is something else, and it is the means of leading the flock forward. One of the important things in the work of ministry is to accompany people step after step on their way towards maturity. Each one of us has had this experience: that the Church as mother has accompanied us and continues to accompany us in our own process of growth. I don’t like reductionism: it is not ecclesial, it is gnostic; it is like a gnostic heresy that today is somewhat fashionable, a form of gnosticism that reduces ecclesial realities to ideas. And this does not help. The Church is a mother; she accepts everyone, and each person makes his or her own way forward within the Church, without making a fuss, and this is very important. Thank you for having the courage to ask this question. Thank you.

Pope Francis

[Matteo Bruni] asked me about my experience of World Youth Day. This is the fourth that I have experienced. The first was in [Rio de Janeiro](#), which was monumental, in Brazilian style, beautiful! The second was in [Kraków](#), the third in [Panama](#), and this was the fourth. This was the most numerous. The actual statistics: there were more than a million people present. Even more: [at the Mass yesterday](#), and [the evening Vigil](#), the numbers were calculated at a million and 4 or 6 hundred thousand. Those are the government’s figures. The numbers were impressive. And it was very well prepared! Among the ones I have seen, this was the best prepared. And young people are a surprise. Young people are young, they act like young people, that’s life, but they try to look forward and they are the future. The issue is accompaniment, and the problem is to know how to do this, so that they do not lose their roots. That is why I insist so greatly on dialogue between old and young, between grandparents and grandchildren. This dialogue is important, more important than dialogue between parents and children. With the elderly, this has to be done because that is where (young people) get their roots. Then too, young people are religious; they are not looking for a harsh, artificial and legalistic faith, but for an encounter with Jesus Christ. And that is not easy. It is an experience... People say: “But young people do not always live moral lives...” Who among us has been without one moral failing in our lives? Every one of us! With regard to any one of the commandments, each one of us has his or her failings and his or her own history. That’s how life is. But the Lord awaits us always, for he is merciful and a Father, and mercy goes beyond everything. For me it was a beautiful experience, and today, before boarding the plane, I was with the volunteers who were... do you know how many they were?

Matteo Bruni

25 thousand.

Pope Francis

25 thousand! What an impressive turnout. It is truly beautiful. That is what I wanted to say about the World Youth Day.

Matteo Bruni

Let us finish with that. Your Holiness?

Pope Francis

There is one last...

Matteo Bruni

So then, perhaps one last question from Justin, of CNS

Justin McLellan – CNS (Catholic News Service)

About World Youth Day, in these days we heard several testimonies from young people who experienced problems of mental health, and struggled with depression. Did you ever struggle with this? And if a person chooses to commit suicide, what would you say to their family members, who, given Catholic teaching on suicide, suffer at the thought that he or she went to hell?

Pope Francis

Nowadays, suicide among young people is an important problem, the numbers are significant. The media don't talk much about this, because they don't have the information. Here (in Lisbon) I had a conversation – not in confession – with young people, since I am helped by this, and one young person said: "Can I ask you a question? What do you think of suicide?" He did not speak our language but I clearly understood what he was saying, and we began to talk about suicide. And at the end, he said to me: "Thank you, because last year I was undecided whether to do it or not". There are many young people who feel deep anxiety and are depressed, and not only psychologically... In some countries the universities are very demanding; young people fail to obtain a degree or to find work and then commit suicide, because they feel great shame. I am not saying that this is a daily occurrence, but it is a problem. And it is a problem right now. It happens.

Matteo Bruni

Thank you, Holy Father, for responding to our questions.

Pope Francis

And I thank all of you for everything you do. And I would urge you: don't forget the book by that migrant, *Hermanito*. Thank you!

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