



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 6 February 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Apostolic Journey to the United Arab Emirates

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

In recent days, [I made a brief Apostolic Journey to the United Arab Emirates](#); a short but very important Journey which, drawing on the 2017 [encounter in Al-Azhar, Egypt](#), has written a new page in the history of dialogue between Christianity and Islam and in the commitment to promote peace in the world on the basis of human fraternity.

For the first time, a Pope visited the Arabian Peninsula. And Providence ordained that the visit be from a Pope named Francis, 800 years after Saint Francis of Assisi's visit to Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. I often thought of Saint Francis during this Journey. It helped me to keep the Gospel and the love of Jesus Christ in my heart, as I experienced the various moments of the visit. In my heart were the Gospel of Christ, the prayer to the Father for all his children, especially the poorest, for the victims of injustice, war, misery...; the prayer that the dialogue between Christianity and Islam may be a decisive factor for peace in the world today.

I sincerely thank the Crown Prince, the President, the Vice President and all the Authorities of the United Arab Emirates who welcomed me with great kindness. That country has grown very much in recent decades. It has become a crossroads between East and West, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious 'oasis' and thus, a suitable place in which to promote the culture of encounter. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Bishop Paul Hinder, Vicar Apostolic to Southern Arabia, who prepared and organized the event for the Catholic community, and I extend my affectionate 'thanks' to the priests, religious and lay people who keep the Christian presence alive in that land.

I had the opportunity to greet the first priest — in his 90s — who had gone there to found many communities. He is in a wheelchair and blind but the smile never fades from his lips, the smile of having served the Lord and of having done so much good. I also greeted another priest in his 90s

— but he could walk and continues to work. Well done! — and many priests who are there at the service of the Christian communities of Latin Rite, of the Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankar and Maronite Rites who come from Lebanon, India, the Philippines and other countries.

Aside from the discourses, a further step was taken in Abu Dhabi: the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and I signed the [*Document on Human Fraternity*](#), in which together we state the common vocation of all men and women to be brothers and sisters as we are the sons and daughters of God; we condemn all forms of violence, especially those cloaked in religious motivations; and we commit ourselves to spread authentic values and peace throughout the world. This Document will be studied in the schools and universities of many countries. But I also recommend that you read it, get to know it, because it offers many incentives for furthering the dialogue on human fraternity.

In an epoch such as our own, in which there is a strong temptation to see an ongoing conflict between the Christian and Islamic civilizations, and also to consider religions as a source of conflict, we wished to give an ulterior, clear and decisive sign, that it is indeed possible to come together; it is possible to respect one another and to dialogue; and that, even in the diversity of cultures and traditions, the Christian and Islamic worlds appreciate and uphold common values: life, family, religious sense, honour for the elderly, the education of young people, and still others.

A little over a million *Christians* live in the United Arab Emirates: workers who originally came from various countries in Asia. Yesterday morning I met representatives of the Catholic community in Saint Joseph's *Cathedral* in Abu Dhabi — a very simple temple — and then, after this meeting, I celebrated for everyone. There were so many! — They say that those who were inside the stadium, which has a capacity of 40 thousand, and those who were in front of the screens outside the stadium, reached 150 thousand! [*I celebrated the Eucharist in the city's stadium*](#), proclaiming the Gospel of the Beatitudes. During the *Mass*, concelebrated with the Patriarchs, the Major Archbishops and Bishops present, we prayed especially for peace and justice, with special intentions for the Middle East and for Yemen.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Journey is part of God's 'surprises'. Therefore let us praise him and his providence, and let us pray that the seeds scattered may bear fruit according to his holy will.

Appeal and Special Greetings

Last Saturday, near the archipelago of the Bahamas, a boat from Haiti sank with dozens of migrants aboard, coming in search of hope and a future of peace. My deep sympathy goes to the families tried by sorrow, as well as to the Haitian people struck by this new tragedy. I invite you to join me in praying for those who have tragically perished and for the injured.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those

from England and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *newlyweds* and to *the elderly*. I wish for everyone that the visit to the Eternal City may inspire you to deepen the Word of God so as to be able to proclaim that Jesus is our Saviour and our true peace.