



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 21 January 2015

[Multimedia]

Apostolic Journey to Sri Lanka and the Philippines

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

Today I will focus on the Apostolic Journey to Sri Lanka and the Philippines, which I made last week. After [my visit to Korea](#) a few months ago, I again returned to Asia, that continent rich in cultural and spiritual traditions. The Journey was above all a joyful encounter with the ecclesial communities which, in those countries, bear witness to Christ: I confirmed them in their faith and missionary spirit. I will forever carry in my heart the memory of the festive welcome from the crowds — in some cases the size of an ocean — which accompanied those salient moments of the Journey. Furthermore, I encouraged interreligious dialogue at the service of peace, as well as the journey of those peoples towards unity and social development, especially with families and young people playing a prominent role.

The culminating moment of my stay in Sri Lanka was the [canonization of the great missionary Joseph Vaz](#). This holy priest administered the Sacraments, often in secret, to the faithful, but he helped all those in need from every religion and social condition, without distinction. His example of holiness and love for neighbour continues to inspire the Church in Sri Lanka in her apostolate of charity and education. I pointed to St Joseph Vaz as a model for all Christians, called today to offer the saving truth of the Gospel in a multireligious context, with respect for others, with perseverance and with humility.

Sri Lanka is a country of great natural beauty, whose people are seeking to rebuild unity after a long and dramatic civil conflict. In [my meeting with Government Authorities](#) I stressed the

importance of dialogue, respect for human dignity, the need to involve everyone in order to find appropriate solutions to further reconciliation and the common good.

The different religions have a crucial role to play in this regard. My encounter with religious leaders was a confirmation of the good relations that already exist between the various communities. In this context, I wanted to encourage the cooperation already undertaken by the followers of different religious traditions, in order to also heal, with the balm of forgiveness, those who are still afflicted by the suffering of the last years. The theme of *reconciliation* also marked my visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu, deeply venerated by the Tamil and Sinhalese peoples and a centre of pilgrimage for members of other religions. In that holy place we asked Mary, our Mother, to obtain for all the people of Sri Lanka the gift of unity and peace.

From Sri Lanka I flew to the Philippines, where the Church is preparing to celebrate the *fifth centenary of the Gospel's arrival*. It is the foremost Catholic country in Asia, and the Filipino people are well known for their deep faith, their religiosity and enthusiasm, even in the diaspora. In my meeting with the nation's Authorities, as well as in moments of prayer and during the crowded concluding Mass, I stressed the continual fruitfulness of the Gospel and its capacity to inspire a society worthy of man, in which there is room for the dignity of each and for the aspirations of the Filipino people.

The main scope of my visit, and the motive for which I chose to go to the Philippines — this was the main reason — was to be able to express my *closeness* to our brothers and sisters who suffered the *devastation of Typhoon Yolanda*. I went to Tacloban, in the region most seriously hit, where I paid homage to the faith and resilience of the local population. In Tacloban, unfortunately, adverse weather conditions claimed yet another innocent victim: the young volunteer Kristel, struck and killed by a structure that collapsed in the wind. I then thanked those who, from every part of the world, responded to their adversity with a generous outpouring of aid. The power of God's love, revealed in the mystery of the Cross, was made evident in the spirit of solidarity demonstrated by the many acts of charity and sacrifice that marked those dark days.

The encounters with families and young people, in Manila, were salient moments of my visit to the Philippines. Healthy *families* are essential to the life of a society. It gives consolation and hope to see so many large families that welcome children as a gift from God. They know that every child is a blessing. I have heard it said by some that families with many children and the birth of many children are among the causes of poverty. That opinion seems simplistic to me. I can say, we can all say, that the main cause of poverty is an economic system that has canceled the person from the centre and set money in its place; an economic system that excludes, always excludes: excludes children, the elderly, young people, the unemployed... and that creates the throw-away culture we live in. We are accustomed to seeing people discarded. This is the main cause of poverty, not large families. Looking to the figure of St Joseph, who protected the life of the "Santo Niño", much venerated in that land, I recalled that we need to protect families who are being

threatened in different ways so that they can bear witness to the beauty of the family in God's plan. We also need to defend the family from new ideological colonizations that threaten its identity and mission.

It was a joy for me to be with the young people of the Philippines, to listen to their hopes and their anxieties. I wanted to offer them my encouragement in their effort to contribute to the renewal of society, especially through service to the poor and safeguarding the environment.

Care for the poor is an essential element of our Christian life and witness — I stressed this too during my visit; it entails the rejection of every form of corruption, for corruption robs the poor. It calls for a culture of honesty.

I thank the Lord for this pastoral visit to Sri Lanka and the Philippines. I ask Him to bless these two Countries for ever and to strengthen the fidelity of Christians to the Gospel message of our redemption, reconciliation and communion with Christ.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including the various groups from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, New Zealand, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I invoke grace and peace in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all!

I address a special thought to *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which we are celebrating, offers us the opportunity to reflect on our belonging to Christ and to the Church. Dear *young people*, pray that all Christians be one family; dear *sick people*, offer up your suffering for the cause of unity in the Church; and you, dear *newlyweds*, experience the freedom of the gift of love, which is the kind that God bears for humanity.

Appeal

I would now like to invite you to pray together for the victims of events in these last days in beloved Niger. Brutality directed at Christians, children and churches. Let us invoke the Lord for the gift of reconciliation and peace so that religious sentiment may never become an occasion for violence, suppression and destruction. War must not be waged in the name of God! I hope that as soon as possible a climate of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence may be reestablished for the good of all. Let us pray to Our Lady for the people of Niger (Hail Mary...).

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