



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 2 December 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Apostolic Journey to Africa

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

A few days ago I made [my first Apostolic Journey to Africa](#). Africa is beautiful! I thank the Lord for this great gift of his, which allowed me to visit three countries: first Kenya, then Uganda and finally the Central African Republic. Once again I express my gratitude to the civil authorities and to the bishops of these nations for welcoming me, and I thank all of those who collaborated in so many ways. My heartfelt thanks!

Kenya is a country that characterizes the global challenge of our time: to protect creation by reshaping the model of development to be equitable, inclusive and sustainable. All this can be seen in Nairobi, the largest city in East Africa, where wealth and poverty coexist: this is a scandal! Not only in Africa but here too, everywhere. The coexistence of wealth and poverty is a scandal, it is a disgrace for humanity. Nairobi is where the Office of the United Nations Environmental Programme, which I visited, is located. In Kenya I met the authorities and diplomats, and also the residents of a poor neighbourhood; I met the leaders of various Christian confessions and of other religions, priests and consecrated people. I met young people, so many young people! On each occasion I encouraged them to treasure the great wealth of that country: the natural and spiritual wealth, made up of the earth's resources, of the younger generations and of the values that shape the wisdom of the people. In today's tragic context I had the joy of bringing Jesus' word of hope: "*Stand strong in faith, do not be afraid*". This was the motto of the visit, words that are lived each day by many humble and simple people, with noble dignity. They are words witnessed to in a tragic and heroic way by the young people of Garissa University who were killed this past 2 April for being Christians. Their blood is the seed of peace and fraternity for Kenya, for Africa and for the entire world.

Then, in Uganda my visit unfolded under the auspice of the country's martyrs, 50 years after their historic canonization by Bl. Paul VI. This is why the motto was: "*You will be my witnesses*" (Acts

1:8). The motto connotes the words that immediately precede: “You will receive power from the Holy Spirit”, because it is the Spirit that enlivens the heart and hands of missionary disciples. The entire visit in Uganda took place with the fervour of witness enlivened by the Holy Spirit. Witness in the explicit sense is the service of the catechists, whom I thanked and encouraged for their dedication, which often also involves their families. Witness is that of charity, which I saw firsthand at the House of Nalukolongo, and which sees so many communities and associations committed in service to the poor, the disabled, the sick. Witness is that of the young people who, despite the challenges, go against the tide, safeguard the gift of hope, and seek to live according to the Gospel and not according to the world. Witnesses are the priests, the consecrated men and women who day by day renew their total “yes” to Christ and dedicate themselves with joy to the service of the holy People of God. And there is another group of witnesses, but I will speak of them later. All of this manifold testimony, enlivened by the very same Holy Spirit, is leaven for the entire society, as shown by the effective work performed in Uganda in the fight against AIDS and in the welcoming of refugees.

The third leg of the journey was in the Central African Republic, in the geographical heart of the continent: really, it’s the heart of Africa. This visit was really the first in my intentions, because this country is seeking to escape a very difficult period of violent conflicts and so much suffering in the population. This is why I wanted, there in Bangui, a week in advance, to open the first Holy Door of the Jubilee of Mercy, as a sign of faith and hope for that people, and symbolically for all the African peoples most in need of redemption and comfort. Jesus’ invitation to the disciples: “*Let us cross over to another shore*” (cf. Lk 8:22), was the motto for Central Africa. “Cross over to another shore”, in the civil sense, means to leave behind war, division, poverty, and choose peace, reconciliation, development. But this presumes a “passing” that takes place in the conscience, in the attitudes and intentions of the people. On this level the contribution of religious communities is crucial. For this reason I met the Evangelical and Muslim communities, sharing prayer and the commitment for peace. With the priests and consecrated people, but also with young people, we shared the joy of feeling that the Risen Lord is with us in the boat, and he guides us to the other shore. Last, in the final Mass at the stadium of Bangui, on the Feast of the Apostle Andrew, we renewed the commitment to follow Jesus, our hope, our peace, Face of Divine Mercy. This last Mass was marvellous: it was full of young people, a stadium of youth! More than half the population of the Central African Republic are minors, they are under 18 years old: a promise for moving forward!

I would like to say a word about the missionaries: men and women who have left their homelands, everything.... When they were young they went there, living a life of so very much work, sometimes sleeping on the ground. At one point in Bangui I found a nun, she was Italian. You could see she was elderly: “How old are you?”. I asked. “81” — “Not very, two years older than me”. — This Sister has been there since she was 23 or 24 years old: all her life! And so many like her. She was with a little girl. And the girl, in Italian, called her “Grandma”. And the nun said to me: “I am not really from here, but from a neighbouring country, from Congo; I came here in a canoe,

with this little girl". This is how the missionaries are: courageous. "What do you do, Sister?" — "I'm a nurse and I also studied here to become an obstetrician and I've delivered 3,280 babies". This is what she told me. An entire life for the life, for the lives of others. And there are so very many like this nun: so many Sisters, so many priests, so many men and women religious who burn up their lives to proclaim Jesus Christ. It is beautiful to see this. It's beautiful.

I would like to say a word to the young people. There aren't many of them, because the birth rate is a luxury, it seems, in Europe: zero % birthrate, 1% birthrate. I am addressing the young people: think about what you are doing with your life. Think about this nun and about the many like her, who have given their life and so many have died there. The missionary spirit is not proselytizing: this nun told me that the Muslim women go to them because they know that the Sisters are good nurses who take good care of them, and they don't catechize in order to convert them! They bear witness; then they do catechesis to those who want it. Witness is the great heroic missionary spirit of the Church. Proclaim Jesus Christ with your life! I am addressing the young: think about what you are doing with your life. It is time to think and ask the Lord to make you feel his will. Please, do not rule out this possibility of becoming a missionary, to bring love, humanity, faith to other countries. Not to proselytize, no. That is done by those who are seeking something else. Faith is preached first by witness and then through words. Slowly.

Together let us praise the Lord for this pilgrimage on African soil, and let ourselves be guided by his key words: "*Stand strong in faith, do not be afraid*"; "*You will be my witnesses*"; "*Let us cross over to another shore*".

Last Sunday we began the Season of Advent. I urge everyone to live this time of preparation for the birth of Jesus, Face of the Merciful Father, in the extraordinary context of the Jubilee, with the spirit of charity, more attention to those who are in need, and with moments of personal and community prayer.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from England, Australia, Korea and the United States of America. My special greeting goes to the group "Up with People" for sharing their music with us. Upon you and your families I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you all.

I address a greeting to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. May the God of peace stimulate you, dear *young people*, to be promoters of dialogue and understanding; may he help you, dear *sick people*, to look to the Cross of Christ to learn to face suffering with serenity; and may he favour in you, dear *newlyweds*, the growth of peace and love in your new family.

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