



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

Wednesday, 8 May 2019

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I returned late last evening from a three-day Apostolic Journey that led me to Bulgaria and North Macedonia. I thank God for having allowed me to make these visits, and I renew my gratitude to the Civil Authorities of these two countries that welcomed me with great courtesy and openness. I offer my most cordial “thank you” to the Bishops and the respective ecclesial communities, for the devout warmth with which they accompanied my pilgrimage.

In Bulgaria I was guided by the memory of Saint John XXIII who was sent to that country in 1925 as Visitor and then as Apostolic Delegate. Animated by his example of benevolence and pastoral charity, I met that people, called to build a bridge between Central, Eastern and Southern Europe; with the motto “*Pacem in Terris*” I invited everyone to walk on the path of fraternity; and on this path, in particular, I had the joy of taking a step forward in the meeting with Patriarch Neofit of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Members of the Holy Synod. Indeed, as Christians, our vocation and mission is to be a sign and instrument of unity, and we can be so, with the help of the Holy Spirit, by putting what unites us before what has divided us or still divides us.

Present day Bulgaria is one of the lands evangelized by Saints Cyril and Methodius, whom Saint John Paul II placed beside Saint Benedict as Patron Saints of Europe. In Sofia, in the majestic Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky, I paused in prayer before the sacred image of the two brother Saints. Of Greek origin, from Thessaloniki, they were able to use their culture creatively to pass on the Christian message to the Slavic peoples; they invented a new alphabet with which to translate the Bible and liturgical texts into the Slavic language. Today too there is need for passionate and creative evangelizers, so that the Gospel may reach those who still do not know it, that it may again irrigate the lands where the ancient Christian roots have withered. With this horizon I celebrated the Eucharist twice with the Catholic community in Bulgaria and I

encouraged them to be hopeful and fruitful. I again thank that People of God who showed me so much faith and so much affection.

The last event in Bulgaria took place together with representatives of the different religions: we invoked God for the gift of peace, while a group of children carried lighted torches, a symbol of faith and hope.

In North Macedonia I was accompanied by the strong spiritual presence of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was born in Skopje in 1910, and there, in her parish, received the Sacraments of Christian initiation and learned to love Jesus. In this woman, petite but powerful thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, we see the image of the Church in that country and in other peripheries of the world: a small community which, with Christ's grace, becomes a welcoming home where many find solace in life. At the Mother Teresa Memorial, I prayed in the presence of other religious leaders and a large group of poor people, and I blessed the foundation stone of a shrine dedicated to her.

North Macedonia has been an independent country since 1991. The Holy See has sought to support its journey from the very start. With my visit, I wanted to encourage above all its traditional ability to host different ethnic and religious groups; as well as its commitment to welcoming and assisting a large number of migrants and refugees during the critical period of 2015 and 2016. There is great welcome there. They have a big heart. The migrants create some issues for them, but they welcome them and they love them and they resolve the issues. A round of applause for this people!

North Macedonia is a young nation from an institutional point of view; a small country in need of opening up to wide horizons without losing its own roots. This is why it was significant that the encounter with young people took place precisely there. Young people of different Christian denominations and also of other religions — Muslims, for example — all of them united in their desire to build something beautiful in life. I urged them to dream big and to get involved like young Agnes — the future Mother Teresa — by listening to the voice of God who speaks in prayer and in the flesh of our needy brothers and sisters. When I went to visit the Sisters of Mother Teresa, I was taken aback: they were with the poor and I was struck by the evangelical tenderness of these women. This tenderness comes from prayer, from adoration. They welcome everyone. They feel they are sisters, mothers of everyone. They do this with tenderness. Often we Christians lose this dimension of tenderness, and when there is no tenderness we become too serious, sour. These sisters are gentle in their tenderness and they do charity work, but charity as it truly is, without disguising it. Instead when one does charity without tenderness, without love, it is as if we were throwing a glass of vinegar on the work of charity. No, charity is joyful; it is not sour. These sisters are a shining example. May God bless them all.

In addition to the testimonies of young people, in Skopje I also listened to those of priests and

consecrated people. Men and women who have given their lives to Christ. For them, sooner or later there is the temptation to say: "Lord, what is my small gift before the problems of the Church and of the world?". Therefore I reminded them that a bit of leaven can make the whole dough rise, and a little pure and intense perfume can pervade the whole area with a pleasant aroma.

It is the mystery of Jesus-Eucharist, the seed of new life for all of humanity. During the Mass we celebrated in Skopje Square, we renewed in a periphery of present day Europe, the miracle of God who, with a few broken and shared loaves and fish, satisfies the hunger of the multitude. Let us entrust the present and the future of the peoples I visited on this journey to his inexhaustible Providence. And I invite all of you to pray that Our Lady may bless these two countries: Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

After praying the Hail Mary, the Holy Father continued as follows:

In Mexico City last Saturday, Maria de la Concepcion Cabrera was proclaimed Blessed; the mother of a family who witnessed to the salvific value of Christ's Cross, inspiring the founding of various religious and lay institutions. Let us give thanks to God for this courageous witness. An applause for Blessed Conchita!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Denmark, Nigeria, Kenya, India, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

I offer a special greeting to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Today is the day dedicated to the Supplication to Our Lady of Pompeii. We are joined in spirit with those gathered in that Marian Shrine as well as with those elsewhere who will gather together at noon to faithfully recite the Supplication to our Lady, so that she may turn her gaze upon the world and intercede for the entire Church and for those who suffer in body and in spirit.

Moreover, the Solemnity of Our Lady of Luján is being celebrated in my country today. Let us all pray together for Argentina.