



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 9 November 2022

[Multimedia]

Catechesis - *The Apostolic Journey to the Kingdom of Bahrain*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

It's a bit cold, isn't it? But it's beautiful.

Before I begin to speak about what I have prepared, I would like to draw attention to these two children who came up here. They did not ask permission. They did not say, "I am afraid". They came up directly. This is how we have to be with God: direct. They have given us an example of how we should behave with God, with the Lord: go ahead! He is always waiting for us. It was good for me to see the trust of these two children. It was an example for all of us. This is how we should always draw near the Lord — freely. Thank you.

Three days ago, I returned from my [trip to the Kingdom of Bahrain](#) which I truly did not know. I did not really know what that kingdom was like. I would like to thank everyone who accompanied this visit through the support of their prayers, and to renew my gratitude to His Majesty the King, the other Authorities, the local Church and the people, for their warm welcome. And I would also like to thank those who organize these journeys. To make this trip happen, it takes a bustle of people. The Secretariat of State works a lot to prepare the discourses, to prepare the logistics, everything, there is a lot of activity... then the translators... and then, the Gendarmerie Corps, the Swiss Guards Corps, who are wonderful. It is a tremendous amount of work! To everyone, to all of you, I

would like to thank you publicly for all that you do to ensure that the Pope's journeys go well. Thank you.

It is natural to wonder why the Pope wanted to visit this small country with such a large Islamic majority. There are so many Christian countries — why not go to one of them first? I would like to respond through three words: dialogue, encounter and journey.

Dialogue : the opportunity for the long-desired Journey was afforded by the invitation of the King to a [Forum on dialogue between the East and the West](#), a dialogue that seeks to discover the richness that other peoples, traditions and beliefs possess. Bahrain, an archipelago formed by many islands, helped us understand that one must not live in isolation, but by drawing closer. In Bahrain, which is made up of islands, they drew close, they brush up against each other. The cause of peace requires this, and dialogue is “the oxygen of peace”. Do not forget this. Dialogue is the oxygen of peace. Even for peace in our homes. If there is war there between husband and wife, they can move ahead in peace, with dialogue. In the family, too, dialogue; dialogue, for peace is preserved through dialogue. Almost 60 years ago, the Second Vatican Council, speaking about building an edifice of peace, stated that “it certainly demands that [men and women] extend their thoughts and their spirit beyond the confines of their own nation, that they put aside national selfishness and ambition to dominate other nations, and that they nourish a profound reverence for the whole of humanity, which is already making its way so laboriously toward greater unity” ([Gaudium et spes](#), 82). I sensed this need in Bahrain and I hoped that religious and civil leaders throughout the world might be able to look beyond their own borders, their own communities, to care for the whole. This is the only way to confront certain universal issues, for example, that God is being forgotten, the tragedy of hunger, the care of creation, peace. These things can be thought of all together. In this sense, the Forum for dialogue, entitled “East and West for Human Coexistence”, encouraged choosing the path of encounter and rejecting that of confrontation. How much we need this! There is such a need to encounter each other. I am thinking of the insanity of war — insane! — of which martyred Ukraine is a victim, and of many other conflicts, that will never be resolved with the infantile logic of weapons, but only with the gentle power of dialogue. But in addition to Ukraine, which is being tormented, let us think of the wars that have been going on for years, and let us think of Syria — more than 10 years! — let us think, for example, of Syria, let us think of the children in Yemen, let us think of Myanmar: everywhere! Right now, Ukraine is closer. What do wars do? They destroy, they destroy humanity, they destroy everything. Conflicts should not be resolved through war.

But there can be no dialogue without the second word — *encounter*. We met each other in Bahrain. Several times, I heard the desire emerge that encounters between Christians and Muslims increase, that they form stronger relationships, that this be taken more to heart. As is customary in the East, in Bahrain, people place their hand on their heart when they greet someone. I did this too, to make room inside me for the person I was meeting. For without this welcome, dialogue remains empty, seeming. It remains a matter of ideas rather than reality.

Among the many meetings, I recall the one with my dear Brother, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar — my dear brother! — and the one with the young people at Sacred Heart School, students who gave us a great lesson: Christians and Muslims studying together. Young people, boys and girls, children need to get to know each other so that fraternal encounter might prevent ideological divisions. And now I would like to thank Sacred Heart School; I thank Sister Rosalyn who has done so well in carrying this school forward, and the young people who participated with their discourses, through prayer, dance, song — I remember them well! Thank you so much! But even the elderly offered a witness of fraternal wisdom. I recall the [meeting with the Muslim Council of Elders](#), an international organization formed a few years ago that promotes good relationships among Islamic communities under the banner of respect, moderation and peace, opposing fundamentalism and violence.

Thus we move toward the third word: *journey*. The [journey to Bahrain](#) should not be seen as an isolated episode. It is part of a process initiated by Saint John Paul II when he travelled to [Morocco](#). So, the first visit of a Pope in Bahrain represents a new step on the journey between Christian and Muslim believers — not to confuse things or water down the faith, no — dialogue does not water down — but to create fraternal alliances in the name of the Father Abraham, who was a pilgrim on earth under the merciful gaze of the one God of Heaven, the God of peace. This is why the motto of the journey was: “Peace on earth to people of goodwill”. And why do I say that dialogue does not water down? Because in order to dialogue, you have to have your own identity, you have to start from your own identity. If you do not have an identity, you cannot dialogue because you do not even understand who you are. For dialogue to be good, it always has to be rooted in one’s own identity, to be aware of one’s own identity, and from there dialogue can take place.

Dialogue, encounter, and journey in Bahrain also took place among Christians. For example, the [first encounter](#) was ecumenical, a prayer for peace with the dear Patriarch and Brother Bartholomew, and with brothers and sisters of various confessions and rites. It took place in the Cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of Arabia, whose structure resembles a tent, where, according to the Bible, God would meet with Moses in the desert along the journey. The brothers and sisters in the faith, whom I met in Bahrain, truly live “on a journey”. For the most part, they are immigrant labourers who, far from home, discover their roots in the People of God and their family within the larger family of the Church. It’s wonderful to see these migrants — from the Philippines, from India and from other places — Christians who gather and support each other in the faith. And they move ahead joyfully, in the certainty that the hope of God does not disappoint (cf. *Rm* 5:5). [Meeting the Pastors, the consecrated men and women, the pastoral workers](#), and in the festive and moving [Mass](#) celebrated in the stadium with so many members of the faithful who came from other Gulf nations as well, I brought them the affection of the entire Church. This was the journey.

And today I would like to transmit to you their genuine, simple and beautiful joy. Meeting each other and praying together, we felt we were of one heart and one soul. Thinking about their

journey, their daily experience of dialogue, let us all feel called to *expand our horizons* — please, open hearts; not closed, hard hearts. Open your hearts because we are all brothers and sisters and so that this human fraternity may move ahead. Broadening one's horizon, being open, expanding one's interests and dedicating ourselves to getting to know others. If you dedicate yourself to knowing others, you will never be threatened. But if you are afraid of others, you yourself will be a threat to them. Each and every person is needed in order for the journey of fraternity and peace to progress. I can give my hand, but if there is no hand from the other side, it is no use. May Our Lady help us on this journey! Thank you!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Denmark, Finland, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of Christ our Lord. God bless you!

Last Saturday, Sister Maria Carola Cecchin of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo was beatified in Meru, Kenya. She died in 1925 at the age of 48, after bearing witness to the Gospel of charity among African peoples. May her example as a kind and wise woman sustain those who work to spread the Kingdom of God. A round of applause for the new Blessed!

My thoughts turn to the people of Cyprus who are in national mourning over the passing of His Beatitude Chrysostomos II. He was a forward-looking pastor, a man of dialogue and a lover of peace, who tried to foster reconciliation among the different communities in the country. I gratefully remember with affection the fraternal encounters we shared in Cyprus during my visit there last year. Let us pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

I renew my invitation to pray for martyred Ukraine: let us ask the Lord for peace for these people, so tried and who suffer so much cruelty, so much cruelty at the hands of mercenaries who make war.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. Along with her, let us remember the churches in which your communities gather to celebrate the divine mysteries. May the bond with your church stir in each of you, a surge in the joy of walking together at the service of the Gospel, in the offering of prayer and in the sharing of charity. I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My recent [Apostolic Journey to Bahrain](#) was occasioned by the international Forum for Dialogue, which brought together leaders of different religions in the service of peace. Dialogue is in fact “the oxygen of peace”, opening minds and hearts to encounter and breaking down the walls of violence and division. In our world, torn by war and conflict, religious and civil leaders, and all persons of good will, are challenged to look beyond narrow interests and to seek the unity and peace of the entire human family. My visit to Bahrain, a predominantly Muslim country, was yet another step in the promising journey of dialogue, encounter and fraternal cooperation between Christians and Muslims. In those days, I was also able to join Christian leaders in a choral prayer for peace and to celebrate Holy Mass with the Catholic community of Bahrain and the greater Gulf region. May the prayers of Our Lady of Arabia confirm them in their joyful witness of faith and help all believers to persevere on the path to peace, understanding and fraternal coexistence.