



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO ECUADOR, BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY
(5-13 JULY 2015)

MEETING WITH CIVIL AUTHORITIES

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

La Paz Cathedral, Bolivia
Wednesday, 8 July 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Mr President,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet you, the political and civil authorities of Bolivia, the members of the Diplomatic Corps and representatives of the nation's cultural institutions and volunteer organizations. I am grateful to my brother, Archbishop Edmundo Abastoflor of the Church in La Paz, for his kind welcome. With your permission, I would like to offer a few words of encouragement in support of your work, which is ongoing. And I thank you for the collaboration attested to by your warm welcome, which you are giving me so that I may keep going forward. Thank you very much.

Each of us here shares a calling to work for the common good. Fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council defined the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment". I thank you for striving – in your work and your mission – to enable individuals and society to develop and find fulfillment. I am certain that you seek what is beautiful, true and good in your service of the common good. May your efforts contribute to the growth of greater respect for the human person, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral

development, and social peace, namely, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 157). In a word, let wealth be shared.

On the way to the Cathedral from the airport, I was able to admire the peaks of Hayna Potosí, the “young mountain”, and Illimani, the mountain which shows “the place where the sun rises”. I also saw the ingenious way in which many houses and neighborhoods blended with the hillsides, and was struck by the architecture of some of these structures. The natural environment is closely related to the social, political and economic environment. It is urgent for all of us to lay the foundations of an integral ecology – this is a question of health – an integral ecology capable of respecting all these human dimensions in resolving the grave social and environmental issues of our time. Otherwise, the glaciers of those mountains will continue to recede, and our sense of gratitude and responsibility with regard to these gifts, our concern for the world we want to leave to future generations, for its meaning and values, will melt just like those glaciers (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 159-160). And we need be aware of this. An integral ecology – I am going out on a limb here – supposes an ecology of mother earth: taking care of mother earth; with a human ecology: taking care of ourselves; and a social ecology, in the strong sense of the word.

Because everything is related, we need one another. If politics is dominated by financial speculation, or if the economy is ruled solely by a technocratic and utilitarian paradigm concerned with maximum production, we will not grasp, much less resolve, the great problems of humanity. Cultural life has an important role to play in this regard, for it has to do not only with the development of the mind through the sciences and the creation of beauty through the arts, but also esteem for the local traditions of a people – this is also culture – which are so expressive of the milieu in which they arose and emerged, and the milieu which gives them meaning. There is also need for an ethical and moral education which can cultivate solidarity and shared responsibility between individuals. We should acknowledge the specific role of the religions in the development of culture and the benefits which can they can bring to society. We Christians in particular, as disciples of the Good News, are bearers of a message of salvation which has the ability to ennoble and to inspire great ideals. In this way, it leads to ways of acting which transcend individual interest, readiness to make sacrifices for the sake of others, sobriety and other virtues which develop in us the ability to live as one. These virtues which in your culture are expressed so straightforwardly: do not lie, do not steal and do not be lazy.

But we need to be on the alert because it is very easy for us to become accustomed to the atmosphere of inequality all around us, with the result that we take it for granted. Without even being conscious of it, we confuse the “common good” with “prosperity”, and so it goes, sliding bit by bit, and the ideal of the “common good” gets lost, ending up in “prosperity”, especially when we are the ones who enjoy that prosperity, and not the others. Prosperity understood only in terms of material wealth has a tendency to become selfish; it tends to defend private interests, to be unconcerned about others, and to give free rein to consumerism. Understood in this way,

prosperity, instead of helping, breeds conflict and social disintegration; as it becomes more prevalent, it opens the door to the evil of corruption, which brings so much discouragement and damage in its wake. The common good, on the other hand, is much more than the sum of individual interests. It moves from “what is best for me” to “what is best for everyone”. It embraces everything which brings a people together: common purpose, shared values, ideas which help us to look beyond our limited individual horizons.

Different social groups have a responsibility to work for unity and the development of society. Freedom is always the best environment for thinkers, civic associations and the communications media to carry out their activities with passion and creativity in service of the common good. Christians too, are called to be a leaven within society, to bring it their message. The light of Christ’s Gospel is not the property of the Church; the Church is at the service of the Gospel: she must serve the Gospel of Christ, so that it can reach the ends of the earth. Faith is a light which does not blind; ideologies blind, the faith does not blind; it is a light which does not confuse, but which illuminates and respectfully guides the consciences and history of every person and society. Respectfully. Christianity has played an important role in shaping the identity of the Bolivian people. Religious freedom – a phrase we often encounter in civil discourse – also reminds us that faith cannot be restricted to a purely subjective experience. It is not a subculture. The challenge for us will be to help foster the growth of spirituality and commitment of the faith, of Christian commitment in social projects, in deepening the common good, through social projects.

Among the various social groups, I would like to mention in particular the family, which is everywhere threatened by many factors: by domestic violence, alcoholism, sexism, drug addiction, unemployment, urban unrest, the abandonment of the elderly, and children left to the streets. These problems often meet with pseudo-solutions which are not healthy for the family, but which show the clear effects of an ideological colonization... Many social problems are resolved in the family, and resolved quietly; there are so many of them. The failure to assist families would leave those who are most vulnerable without protection.

A nation which seeks the common good cannot be closed in on itself; societies are strengthened by networks of relationships. The current problem of immigration makes this clear. These days it is essential to improve diplomatic relations between the countries of the region, in order to avoid conflicts between sister peoples and to advance frank and open dialogue about their problems. And I am thinking here of the sea; dialogue is essential. Instead of raising walls, we need to be building bridges. Building bridges instead of raising walls. All these issues, thorny as they may be, can find shared solutions; solutions which are reasonable, equitable and lasting. And in any event, they should never be a cause for aggressivity, resentment or enmity; these only worsen situations and stand in the way of their resolution.

Bolivia is at an historic crossroads: politics, the world of culture, the religions are all part of this beautiful challenge to grow in unity. In this land whose history has been marred by exploitation,

greed and so many forms of selfishness and sectarianism, now is the time for integration. And this is path we have to walk. Today Bolivia is capable, with its wealth, of “creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive it is when those cities are full of spaces which connect, relate and favor the recognition of others!” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 210). Bolivia in its process of integration and its search for unity, is called to be an example of such “multifaceted and inviting harmony” (ibid., 117), a harmony which invites along the path of strengthening the greater country.

I thank you for your attention. I pray to the Lord that Bolivia, “this innocent and beautiful land”, may make ever greater progress towards being “the happy homeland whose people enjoy the blessings of good fortune and peace.” May the Blessed Virgin watch over you, and the Lord bless you abundantly. Please, I ask you, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you very much.